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Black Pard;

OR, THE

Gold Boomers of the Big Horn.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S BLUFF," "BUFFALO BILL'S LEAGUE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS CALL FOR HELP.

"HELLO! Hello! For the Lord's sake hello!"
The voice came echoing down from the side of a rugged mountain, and, floating not unmusically across the plain, reached the ears of a horseman riding along, his eyes watchful, and

"I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU, BUFFALO BILL, FEARLESS IN THE FACE OF AN ALMOST CERTAIN DOOM."

his whole bearing that of one aware of that danger surrounded him on every hand.

At the hail and call for help the horseman drew rein, his rifle was gripped for use, and his eyes keenly scanned the mountain sides; but no person was discerned.

Thus a minute passed, and the horseman again rode on, when once again there pealed forth the now plaintive cry:

"Hello! For de Lord's sake, hello!"

Again the rider came to a halt.

"That was a negro's voice, surely. Is one of the Black Cavalrymen at the fort playing a joke upon me? He would not dare do that, I think. So I must see what it means."

The horseman once more moved on, when once again came the cry, more earnest and plaintive than before:

"Hello! Hello! Massa, for de lub of de Lord, hello!"

Again the horseman drew rein.

This time his face assumed a puzzled, almost anxious expression. He seemed wholly at a loss what to do.

Indians might be lurking anywhere in thicket or cover to send a bullet into his heart, but that was the voice of no redskin, and was an appeal for help which he could not ignore.

No other than a redskin was supposed to be nearer than the frontier Government post of Fort Aspen, half a hundred miles away, and the scene was among the then comparatively unknown wilderness of Wyoming.

The horseman sat, watchful and waiting—horse and rider forming a magnificent picture.

The former was large, beautifully limbed, strong and with indications of matchless speed and bottom. His trappings were of the best, and he carried a complete camping outfit, apparently un-mindful of the weight.

The rider was a man of splendid physique, wearing buckskin fringed leggings, stuck in high-top boots, a negligee woolen shirt and a hunting jacket, while a wide-brimmed sombrero sat jauntily upon his head.

His hair, brown and waving, fell upon his broad shoulders like a veil; a moustache and imperial gave him a military appearance, as did also his splendid upright seat in the saddle, like one who knew his power there.

A repeating rifle, usually slung at his saddle cantle, had been brought around for use when he first heard the cry, and about his waist was a belt of arms.

The horseman was William F. Cody, Buffalo Bill, at that time Chief of Scouts in the United States Army.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCOUT IN A QUANDARY.

Stationed at Fort Fetterman, Buffalo Bill had been sent on this lone and daring ride to Fort Caspar, and from thence to Fort Aspen, as the bearer of important dispatches.

Fort Caspar had been left behind, and it was while following up the Sweetwater toward Aspen that the scout, soon after his noonday halt, had heard the cry for help as he rode across a plain bordered by the range from whence had come the call, which he must investigate at all hazards.

As the cry had been repeated each time he started to ride on again, he once more urged his horse forward, when again came the piteous appeal:

"Don't lebe me, massa! For de Lord's sake don't!"

The scout halted quickly, deeply affected by the voice and words.

"I must know who he is, and the situation he is in," muttered the scout.

With this he called in a voice clear as the tones of a bell and far-reaching:

"Hello! Who is it calls?"

"Me, massa! an' I wants yer awful bad."

"Who are you and where are you?"

"Jist by de cliff, massa."

"What are you doing there?"

"Tryin' ter find 'em, sah—my people."

"Where are they?"

"Dey is lost, sah, and I is lost."

The scout was almost as much puzzled as before.

He had located his man, yet it might all be a lure—a cunning dodge for his own capture or destruction.

"Are you sick or hurt? If not, then show yourself."

"Who is you, massa?"

"I am known as Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts at Fetterman."

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! At las' at las! Why, massa Buffler Bill, I was lookin' fer yer, sah!" and the next instant the still unseen man broke forth in merry laughter.

"That nig's as mad as a jack-rabbit," muttered the scout.

"Well, my man, if you are glad to have found me, come out and show yourself."

There was no reply and Buffalo Bill waited fully a minute before he spoke again.

"Where are you?" he demanded.

Still no response.

Was it, after all, a mere blind? Was it a daky? Was not some game to be sprung on him?

Again he called out, and his voice rang back echoes from the cliff.

The next instant there stepped into view upon the cliff the form of the mysterious caller for help.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACK MADMAN.

The man so suddenly appearing upon the cliff stood there like an ebony statue.

His feet were upon the very edge of the cliff, and he looked down from a dizzy height of three hundred feet or more.

Like a bronze image he stood, one hand supporting a rifle slung across his shoulder, the other resting upon the hilt of a large knife in his belt.

His attitude was half offensive, half defensive, and the better to view him Buffalo Bill turned his field glass upon him.

Attentively the scout scanned the stranger. He beheld through his glass a negro all of six feet four inches in height, with rather slender but wiry and athletic frame and the shoulders and heavy neck of an athlete.

He was dressed in buckskin, of dark red hue, from moccasins to cap, and carried upon his back, strapped there like a knapsack, a large pack.

Armed with a rifle, he had a belt about his waist into which were stuck a pair of revolvers and a large bowie-knife.

What might also be called another weapon in skillful hands, a lariat, hung over the pack on his back.

Too far off to see the features of the man, Buffalo Bill yet discovered that the face was as black as ink and the features boldly cast.

"Now, who is he and just what is his little game I should like to know," mused the weary borderman. He evidently decided to ascertain, for he rode quietly toward the base of the cliff.

As he approached closer to the cliff the scout called out:

"Well, my man, come down."

"Massa, I hain't jist able, for I has been cut up a little bit in a fight wid de red niggers, sah, and, 'sides, I is almost starved ter death, an' jes as weak as new-born calf."

Buffalo Bill heard the words, and pondered a moment; then in a low tone murmured:

"I'll chance it."

With this he called out:

"I will come to you, my man."

"Oh, thankee, massa, thankee, sah!"

The scout dismounted, undid a haversack slung to his saddle and, leaving his horse to graze, started boldly for the cliff.

He could but experience a sense of relief when he got close in under its shelter, and, though starting on one side of it, as if then to ascend, he quickly changed and went up on the other side.

After a rough but noiseless climb, he reached the ridge, some hundred yards back from the edge of the cliff. Then he peered cautiously through the cedars, and the first thing his eyes fell upon was a dead body—that of an Indian. A close search ahead of him and he saw a second body!—also that of an Indian.

Moving forward, ready for action, the scout beheld the negro seated upon the ground, leaning against a cedar and looking down in the valley as though watching Buffalo Bill's horse.

"Well, pard, I am here."

The negro started, turned and arose with an effort, leaving his rifle lying upon the rocks.

A glance into his face and Buffalo Bill saw that it was haggard and pinched; the eyes were sunken, and the negro was certainly suffering.

Large as the scout was the negro towered above him.

"Why, you are suffering, my man, yes, and bleeding, too. You have been in hard luck."

"Yes, massa, I has had a wery hard time, but you has come now and I'll git all right, sah."

"Where are you from?"

"From Purgatory, sah."

The scout's face wore a pitying expression, while his good heart grew sympathetic.

"What is your name, my poor fellow?"

"Dey calls me B'elzebub, massa, which means de devil."

"The negro is a madman," decided the scout, and he felt that he must be upon his guard, for the man, a giant in strength, could be desperately dangerous if aroused.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

After a moment's hesitation Buffalo Bill said in a kindly tone:

"Well, Beelzebub, calling you a devil don't make you one, and now I am going to help you."

"Thankee, massa."

"First, you must have something to eat. I brought my bag of provisions up with me."

"Dat's good news, for I is almost starved, sah."

"I see that, but you must eat sparingly at first, and after a while take a good meal. Now, first take some water from my canteen."

The negro drank ravenously until checked by the scout.

Then he was given a piece of hoecake and some cold broiled venison.

This he ate with the eagerness of one half starved.

"Now lie down there and take a nap while I plant those two bodies."

"Dey is Injuns."

"Yes, but they are human. I never leave the dead unburied if I can help it."

"You is a mighty good man, sah. I'll help you."

"No, rest is what you need. I can bury the Indians, so go to sleep."

"I does as you tells me, sah."

The scout took the pack from the negro's back, spread the blankets, then with water from his canteen bathed the man's hurts and was glad to see that he almost at once passed off into a sound sleep.

Going to the dead Indians the scout saw that they were Shoshones and that each had been killed in a death struggle with the black, for each had a knife thrust in his breast.

Both of the reds were armed with rifle, bow and arrows and knife, and as they must have been mounted, the scout concluded their ponies could not be far away.

The soil was too rocky on the cliff for grave digging, so he went off in search of some spot where he could find soil, and a few hundred yards away came upon their ponies, staked out.

Both were good animals, so the scout led them to the cliff, put the dead bodies upon them and took them down to a little meadow land in the valley below.

Here he set to work, wrapped them in their blankets and after an hour's labor had a grave excavated.

Into it they were placed, and the grave filled in. Over the mound heavy rocks were put to guard the remains from the wild beasts.

This sacred duty done, Buffalo Bill returned with one of the ponies to the cliff, to find the negro still asleep.

Arousing him, the poor fellow awoke with a start and a wild glare in his eye.

"It is you, massa."

"I didn't hab a dream, den."

"No, I am here to care for you."

"How do you feel?"

"Hungry, sah, mighty hungry."

"All right; I see that you are better. I buried the reds, and found their ponies, so have one here for you to ride down into the valley, where there is a stream and plenty of wood, so we can have a fire and good supper."

"You is mighty kind, sah."

"You would do the same for me if you found me in distress. Now mount the pony."

The black rose with an effort, stiff and sore as he was, but Buffalo Bill helped him mount and led the way down to the valley.

A snug camping place was found and a fire built. That done, the rescuer went after his own horse, unsaddled him and staked the three animals out near the camp.

The negro lay upon his blankets watching him, but was forbidden to do any work.

A good supper was prepared by the scout, and the black ate a substantial meal.

"You is a good gemman, sah—a mighty good man. I got somethin' ter tell you, too, sah, so I has, fer you is Massa Buf'ler Bill."

After supper the negro lay back against a tree and the scout said:

"You are not able to go on to the fort, Beelzebub, for you could not stand the ride; but I'll go on and come after you with the ambulance sometime to-morrow."

The man started, a frightened look came over his face, and in a voice that quivered he said:

"Don't leab me, sah."

"But I am carrying important dispatches and must go on, while you will be all right here until I get back, for I can be here by noon to-morrow."

"Is you really Massa Buf'ler Bill?"

"Yes, my comrades call me so."

"Den I sure done found Massa Buf'ler Bill?" and the negro spoke eagerly.

"Yes, sure."

"Den you is de man I was lookin' fer, sah, de man dey sent me ter find. De good Lord be praised, I has found yer!" and there was a world of earnestness in the way the words were uttered.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE STORY.

Buffalo Bill's face showed pity.

He felt that the negro was mad, that his assertion that he had been looking for him, had been sent to find him, was but the imaginings of a brain diseased.

"Well, you have found me, my man, and now tell me what I can do for you, for I will have to go on to the fort to-night, and when you go to sleep you will rest well and be much stronger to-morrow."

"You buried dem two red Injuns, sah?"

"Yes, right up the valley there, a short distance."

"Does Injuns' ghosts walk, sah?"

"I have never seen any," with a smile. "I don't go much on ghosts, Beelzebub, be they white, black or red."

"I does, sah. Yer sure de Injuns, afore dey was buried, was sure dead?"

"Yes, no doubt of that. How came you to kill them?"

"You see, sah, I has been a long time lost, a hunting fer you, Massa Buf'ler Bill."

"Well?"

"My feed had given out and I got a bullet choked in my rifle and c'u'dn't git it out, so I wasn't able to git no food."

"I see."

"And I went along a-lookin' and a-lookin' fer you, sah, and growin' weaker all de time, and at last I come out on dat cliff and lay down mighty tired and hongry."

"Poor fellow."

"Yas, sah, I was dat; but I war fast asleep when I war awoke by what I thought was two panthers a-leapin' onter me, but it war Injuns."

"Den, sah, I begin ter fight fer my life, fer dey war tryin' ter tie me, as I know'd, to take me to dere camp and burn me, roast me for de piccaniny Injuns."

"But I fought 'em hard, weak as I war, and we rolled over and over, and oh, my! what a time we hed uf it, sah!"

"I should think so."

"Ef I hadn't been so weak, sah, dey wouldn't hev been nowhar with me in a scrap; but I didn't have my weepins on; my pack war on my back, and dey hed dere knives, yer see."

"But you killed them?"

"Yas, sah, after a long fight, all over de top uf de cliff. Yer see, I jist got de knife away from one, sah, and killed tother with dat; den we scuffle round, me and tother one, fer long time; den I guv de knife p'int to him and dat ended it."

"But if dey was bofe of 'em dead I wasn't much better, fer it tuck me a long time ter come 'round."

"I should think so."

"But I got rested and started ter crawl down the cliff ter find water, when I seen you, sah—yes, sah, seen you, and you war de wery man I war a-lookin' fer, and hasn't you been good ter me—oh, my!"

"Well, Beelzebub, I wish you to tell me where you came from and what you wanted me for."

"I come from de Lost Valley, sah."

"What Lost Valley?"

"Up dere, sah," and he pointed toward the northern mountains.

"In the Big Horn Range or Basin?"

"About dere somewhere, sah."

"That is a long way from here. Where is your horse?"

"Had no horse, Massa Bill."

"Did you walk here?"

"Yes, sah."

"But, what were you doing there?"

"Wid de settlers, sah."

"Impossible! No settlers there."

"Dey is dere, sah; dat's so; went dar a year ago."

"Which way did they go there?"

"Dey went in from Helena, sah."

"How many of them?"

"About fifty, sah."

"All men?"

"No, sah, dere is some women and chillen, too, sah."

"In heaven's name, what did they go there for?"

"Dey went gold huntin', sah, and in case dey didn't find no gold, dey was all prepared to make homes dere."

"And the Indians have not troubled them?"

"Not now, sah; dey can't."

"Why, are you the last survivor?"

"Oh, no, sah; dey is all alive."

"Then why do not Indians trouble them?"

"Dey can't find 'em, sah, fer dey is in de Lost Valley," was the mysterious reply.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF A FORBIDDEN TRAIL.

"Can't find them because they are in the Lost Valley, as you call it, and Indians don't trouble them now."

"Fifty settlers, or gold hunters, and women and children among them, up in the Big Horn country somewhere—why, man you are surely demented."

"No, Massa Buf'ler Bill, I hain't dat, not a little bit; I got heap good sense, sah."

"I can hardly believe the story. The Big Horn country is almost unknown, and where only an army would be safe, for hostiles swarm around it. To get there with such a company of men, women and children would be utterly impossible."

"Dey is dere, sah," was the repeated response.

"Could you tell me just where they are?"

"No, sah, 'cause I is lost."

"You don't know your way back?"

"No, sah, but you kin find 'em."

"Did you just come from there?"

"Yes, sah."

"Which way did you come?"

The negro pointed northward.

"You are sure you did not come from down in Colorado or over from Utah?"

"No, sah; I come right from de north, where de mountains is way up in de clouds, where de rivers is mighty few, and de water of one river smells, oh, so terrible—heap like polecat! But de country is so beautiful, de trees grows so fine, de grass so green, and de valleys is lubly. Oh, it es jes' a land o' milk an honey, sah!"

"You must be describing the Big Horn country, with the sulphur springs flowing into the Stinking Water,* as the Indians call the river, for it is a land of wondrous beauty, lofty mountains, fine timber, the greenest of rich grass and loveliest of valleys, while it is said that gold has been found there, and thus lured other hunters on to their death," and again Buffalo Bill seemed rather to be musing aloud than speaking to the negro.

"Dat's de country, sah, dat's where dey all is," declared Beelzebub eagerly.

"They are in the Big Horn Basin, then?"

"No, sah; I can't jist say dat; but dey is in de Lost Valley."

"I never heard of the Lost Valley."

"It is dere, sah, fer dey calls it so."

"Who does?"

"Dem people I done tole you about, sah."

"Do you think you could go back there?"

"No, sah; but you could, Massa Bill."

"When did you leave there?"

"My rifle tell, sah."

Buffalo Bill got up, and, taking the rifle, saw on the butt a number of little nicks on the stock.

"What do these tell?"

"Days, sah, or most rather nights, fer I cut one each night I stop."

The scout ran hastily over the notches and said:

"Why, there are sixty-seven! Do you mean to say it has been sixty-seven nights since you left the Lost Valley?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why, at ten miles a day you would have walked six hundred and seventy miles!"

"I walk funder den dat, sah. I is a good walker, sah."

"How many large rivers have you crossed?"

"Seven, sah."

"Those might be the Big Horn, Wind River, Nebraska, and Sweetwater, but

*The name "Stinking Water River" was given by the Indians, because the enormous flow from the Sulphur Springs in the Big Horn Basin impregnated the water for many miles, and the odor thus is far reaching. The river is now called the Shoshone, and the beautiful valley is rapidly settling up.

you have recrossed some of them a second time. How did you get over?"

"Swim, sah, and push a log ahead of me with my outfit."

"Why did you not follow up the Big Horn?"

"Mountains was too big, sah."

"Then you have been ranging around in a mighty wild and dangerous country for ever two months, and but for starving you would have struck the trail to Fort Aspen and been all right."

"I hed come to de end of my trail, sah, ef you hadn't found me."

"You save my life, Massa Buf'ler Bill, and thankee, sah, not only fer myself, but fer dem as I left in de Lost Valley, sah."

"But why did you leave them?"

"I come ter find you, sah."

"Who sent you?"

"Dey all sent me, sah; tell me fer de love of de Lord to find yer, fer dere is men dere as knows yer well, and wants yer to come and sabe 'em."

Buffalo Bill looked what he felt—decidedly puzzled.

Was the negro mad, and was all this story a hallucination?

The man certainly was not one of the colored soldiers, for, questioning him closely, Buffalo Bill found that he knew nothing of the army, nothing of any of the frontier posts, save Fort Logan and Fort Ellis, in Montana, which would carry out his story that the settlers had gone from Helena down into the Yellowstone or Big Horn country.

CHAPTER VII.

BUFFALO BILL'S RESOLVE.

For several minutes Buffalo Bill sat in deep meditation, the sable giant watching him eagerly, yet in respectful silence.

Night had fallen now. The horses were feeding quietly not far distant, the camp fire, well hidden by rocks and bushes, burned brightly, and its glare fell upon the fine face of the scout, and also upon the countenance of his mysterious black guest.

The Big Horn country was then a *terra incognita* to all save perhaps a few roving hunters or trappers—a region dreaded by the great surrounding tribes as a Land of Spirits, so awed were they by its wonders of nature.

Its approach upon all sides was strictly and superstitiously guarded—every tribe ready to kill the pale-face who dared venture toward that forbidden, mysterious spirit land.

Yet this giant black asserted that half a hundred pale-faces, women and children among them, were dwelling there!

Deeply interested in discovering whether all told was the story of a diseased brain or a reality, Buffalo Bill quietly settled down to get at the truth.

He would ride the harder to make up for lost time in going to Fort Aspen.

So at last he said:

"Did you leave the Lost Valley on foot, Beelzebub?"

"Yes, sah."

"And left these fifty men, women and children?"

"Yes, Massa Bill."

"Why did you come alone?"

"Nobody else could come, sah."

"Starving, eh?"

"Oh, no, sah; got plenty to eat."

"Then why could they not come with you?"

"Couldn't git out, sah."

"Out of where?"

"De Lost Valley, sah."

"Ah! but you got out. Then, why couldn't they also?"

The negro was silent a moment before he answered:

"Massa Buf'ler Bill, when you goes wif me and sees dat Lost Valley you'll know why they couldn't git out, sah."

"Why do you call it the Lost Valley?"

"Beca'se, sah, dem people in it is lost an' sent me ter find you and beg youter come and find dem."

"But, how am I to do so when you don't know the way back?"

"Dat makes de valley lost, sah; but you knows, and kin go dere, so dey all say, and I goes back wid yer, ob co'se."

"And they are anxious to get back to civilization?"

"Yes, sah."

"Did they find any gold?"

"Yes, sah, picked up a heap in ther canyons, only after dey got lost dey couldn't find it no mo'. I got some gold right wid me I pick up as I come along, sah," and turning to his pack the negro took out a bag holding about a pound of the precious metal.

Scout Cody was more than ever surprised.

"Do you expect me to go alone with you?"

"You knows best, sah, 'bout dat; but let me tell yer, sah, dat yer can't git dere on horseback; got ter go on foot, and den, ag'in, yer better black up yer faces ef ye takes odder men along, for, ye see, we bound ter meet plenty red Injuns, and if yer hab white face dey done kill yer sartin; but dey t'ink niggers is black spirits, and dey keep out ob de way, for dey don't come near me, and jist dusted when dey seen me a-comin'. Yes, sah, if yer blacks up yer kin git dere, and if yer don't yer'll be kilt, sure."

More than ever mystified, Buffalo Bill said, suddenly:

"Beelzebub, I will go with you back to the Lost Valley. But you must do as I tell you; in all things be guided by me, and if you have told me the truth I will find those you have come this long trail to rescue from some danger, I cannot just understand what."

"If you are, as I at first feared, out of right mind, then I must take the consequences of having made a fool of myself."

"You hain't no fool, Massa Bill, and I hain't neither; but I mind jist what you tells me, and de Lord bress you, sah," said the giant black earnestly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST MOVE.

The negro showed his delight in the scout's promise to return with him to the Lost Valley to save the people there from some unknown danger.

Of one thing Cody was convinced—that the negro had not told all—that he was keeping something back, though just what could not even be surmised.

But the scout had made up his mind to fathom the story, get at the bottom facts, and so would proceed accordingly.

By going back to headquarters at Fort Fetterman he could get permission to go on the expedition and could pick from his band of scouts the men he wished to have accompany him upon this, the strangest of all his many trails.

Deciding upon his course as he sat there with the negro, he said:

"I will go on to the fort to-night, leaving with you my provisions and other things to make you comfortable, and I will also leave you my rifle, taking yours on to the fort to get it fixed. I wish you to remain right here until I come back."

"I will, sah, ef you orders it."

"I will take the Indian ponies on with me, and no one will find you here."

"I hain't scared of it, sah, if I feels half well, for I hain't skeery o' nothin' 'cept dead folks."

"And they are the least to be afraid of."

"I will return to-morrow night or the day after, and will then see how you are."

"You find me here, sah."

"That is what I wish to do, for I am going to find your people of the Lost Valley."

"Thankee, sah; but, Massa Bill, yer won't tell about dem people at de fort, sah."

"Why not?"

"Well, sah, dey don't want de sogers ter find 'em; only just you, sah. Dey kin

'splain it all to you, sah; but I can't. Only don't tell about 'em, and about me, sah or de Lost Valley."

Here was yet more mystery. Why should the negro not wish the existence known of the people of the Lost Valley?

But Buffalo Bill only answered:

"All right, Beelzebub; I will not betray you or your people."

"Thankee, sah."

"You wanted ter send after me from de fort, sah, but I had made up my mind I wouldn't been here when yer got back wid de ambulance."

"Aha! you were going to give me the slip?"

"Yes, sah, dat's it; but I won't do it now, sah, fer you done say yer won't tell."

"No, I will keep your secret. But, now, I must be off."

The scout piled wood up near, put his bag of provisions by the fire for the negro's use, and filled his own and the black's canteen with water. Then he saddled his own horse, took the two Indian ponies in hand, and with a word of good-by rode away.

Getting off his horse after going half a mile, he returned on foot, crept near and had a look at the lone camp.

The negro had wrapped his blankets about him and was apparently fast asleep.

"I believe I can trust him."

"He is at least too badly used up to go far," decided the scout, and he withdrew noiselessly.

It was then drawing on toward midnight, and knowing that his horse had a good long rest and food, he put him into a canter and kept up the pace mile after mile, wishing to reach the post by daylight.

It was dawn when he came in sight of Fort Aspen, but the flag had been run up when the sun rose, before he rode up to the sentinel on guard at the main entrance.

The officer of the day sent him to quarters, where he had his breakfast, and then, dispatches in hand, he went up to report to the commandant, Colonel Crandall.

That officer had just lighted his cigar, after breakfast, and, recognizing the scout, called out:

"Ho, Cody! Glad to see you!"

"Anything wrong at Fetterman?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE COLONEL'S WARNING.

Buffalo Bill assured Colonel Crandall that nothing was wrong at Fort Fetterman, gave him the dispatches and waited until he had read them.

After discussing with the scout various matters of interest along the frontier, the colonel said:

"When do you wish to return, Cody, for I suppose you desire several days rest, as there is no need for haste?"

"I would like to start back to-night, sir, if convenient to you?"

"I can have my dispatches ready; but that gives you little time for rest."

"I am anxious to get back, sir."

"Anything urgent on hand?"

"I desire to go on a scout up into the Big Horn country, sir."

"Surely not alone, but with cavalry?"

"Only a few of my scouts, colonel."

"It is dangerous work, Cody."

"Yes, sir, but I have a desire to get a better look at the Big Horn country than has yet been had. Have any of your men gone up that way, sir?"

"No, and they will not with my permission, for the Indians fairly swarm up there, knowing what a country it is for retreats, and it will be many a long day before the Government establishes any forts up that way, more than what we now have."

"Pardon me, Colonel Crandall, but did you ever hear of any one going into the Big Horn country?"

"There is a camp yarn that old Cali-

for California Joe and you went there some years ago, but I never believed it."

"It is true, sir. I was riding Pony Express then, under Alf Slade, and went with California Joe, who had penetrated there more than once."

"What on earth did you go for?"

"To find the band of men who had penetrated there in search of gold and who had not returned, sir."

"I remember now. You found them?"

"Their bones, sir, in their camp, as all had died of starvation on their way out with their gold, which, however, they had hidden beyond all chance of finding."

"But, you have an idea you would like to try again for that gold?"

"No, sir; I gave that up, as California Joe did. I want to see more of the country, find out about what the strength of the Indians is, and if any one else has gone there."

"You will find only redskins there, and if pale-faces have gone in their bones will alone remain to tell the fate of their desperate foolhardiness."

"Take my advice, Cody, and don't go."

Buffalo Bill bowed in silence but the officer's advice did not alter his purpose.

Telling the colonel that he would report for the dispatches, he went out and, seeking the quarters assigned him, laid down for a few hours' rest.

When he arose much refreshed, he found many friends to greet him, for he was a great favorite with officers, soldiers and scouts, who were proud of him as the very King of Bordermen.

As well as he could without disclosing the secret of the negro giant the scout questioned guardedly those likely to be informed of any one having penetrated the Big Horn country from any quarter, but he learned no more than that several daring bands had started for the Big Horn range to prospect for gold—that some of these parties had returned with terrible stories of hardships and death to tell, and others had never been heard of again.

Nothing could he learn of any party answering the description of those described by the mysterious negro.

Going to the fort traders, Buffalo Bill bought a lot of provisions and some camp equipage, and put all on a pack saddle to be strapped on one of the Indian ponies.

He got also from the surgeon some bandages, arnica and other things needed for wounds or injuries and after a hearty supper reported to Colonel Crandall at headquarters.

The dispatches were ready and the first thing the colonel said to him was:

"Cody, give up that foolish idea of going into the Big Horn country. I have been thinking over what you said and was half inclined to write Colonel Mason not to let you go."

"I am glad you did not, sir, for I feel that I can accomplish good by going, otherwise I would not go."

"I must ask you, sir, not to speak of my intention, for it is a secret; but I feel that I am doing right."

"Ah! you know more than you will tell me? But that is your business, Cody, and I will not seek to know, for you have got a very level head; but, remember, I have warned you not to take such desperate chances. Good-by, and luck to you! I shall be most anxious until I hear from you again."

The scout thanked the officer and rode away from the fort just as the flag came fluttering down from the staff and the sunset gun was echoing far and wide.

CHAPTER X.

THE INDIAN VISITOR.

It was after midnight when Buffalo Bill rode up to the lone camp in the canyon and saw the glimmer of the little camp-fire, while he heard the sharply spoken words:

"Who is dat dar? Talk quick!"

"All right, Beelzebub. On the alert I see?"

"Yes, Massa Buf'ler Bill, and mighty glad ter see yer, sah."

"Did you not know me?"

"Yer see, sah, I has had another visitor, and I wasn't jist sartin who you might be."

"Another visitor, eh? When?"

"Ter-night, sah."

"Who was he?"

"A red Injun, sah."

"And he got away from you?"

"No, sah, I put him to sleep."

"Killed him, eh?"

"Yes, sah."

"Where is he?"

"Sleepin' over yonder, sah, whar he tumble."

The negro pointed to a spot off from the camp, and, walking over there, the scout scattered a number of coyotes that were cautiously creeping near and waiting for a feast.

The Indian lay in a heap, as he had fallen, and, dragging him up to the camp-fire, the scout saw a bullet wound in his head, while he still grasped, in the cold clutch of death, the rifle he had cocked and was ready to fire.

"You just anticipated him, Beelzebub."

"You were fortunate, for he intended to kill you."

"Yes, sah."

"I seen him sneakin' round in de daylight, and jist laid for him, 'cause I know'd he'd come when it got dark."

"I seen him coming along a-stoopin' when he thought I was asleep, and when he stop I jist let him hab a shot."

"Dat's a first-class gun ob yours, Massa Bill."

"Yes, Beelzebub, and I have brought yours back all right, and an extra one besides, a new repeating rifle presented me by an officer at the fort."

"I have also got an extra belt of weapons, another present, plenty of ammunition, and provisions galore, with other things."

"How are you feeling?"

"Mighty stiff and sore, sah, and I is mighty glad yer hab come."

"How many Indians did you see?"

"Only that one, sah."

"He had doubtless become parted from the other two and was on their trail."

"I crossed their trail before I saw you the other day, and there were the tracks of three ponies, so that this one makes all present or accounted for."

"I hope so, sah."

"We are going to have some falling weather now, I am sure, so I wish to leave here at daybreak and go to the place where I wish you to remain until I return with my scouts, for I have to go on to Fort Fetterman."

"You can ride, I guess, taking it slow."

"Yes, sah, I'll go."

"Then we'll get several hours' sleep and then start."

The horses were staked out, more wood thrown on the camp-fire and the scout turned in for a rest, for he was tired.

But he was up before dawn, the water was put on to boil, then the dead Indian was taken up the canyon to where the others were buried, and the scout hastily opened the grave and placed the body in it.

Returning to the camp, he found that Beelzebub had breakfast ready, though it had been no easy task for him to do so, and each ate heartily.

The horses were saddled, and with the extra blankets Buffalo Bill made the negro as comfortable in his saddle as was possible.

It was daybreak when the scout mounted and led the way, the pack-horse bringing up the rear.

He was glad to see that the black stood the ride well, and he kept steadily along on his way for hours.

The course of the scout lay northward along the foothills of the Wind River Mountains and toward the latter stream.

A halt was made at noon, the wounds of the negro were tenderly washed and dressed, dinner had, and then the ride was resumed.

Toward night the scout turned into a canyon and said:

"There is a splendid spring ahead, Beelzebub, and of medicinal water."

"It will make a new man of you, and it is a fine, safe camping-place."

"Old California Joe and I were here a couple of years ago, and this is as far as I know the country up this way."

"We are just in time, for it is going to storm to-night, and our trail will be washed out, so no one can track us here, and that is what I wanted."

"You have stood the long ride well, and now you can have a long rest, and I'll do the same to-morrow."

"But now to get a shelter to protect us."

The camp-ground was indeed a safe one, and water, grass and wood were there in abundance.

The old wicky-up built by Buffalo Bill and California Joe still stood, and was quickly added to and made more comfortable.

The pack-saddle and provisions were stored away, the horses staked out, blankets spread and a fire built of large logs.

Then supper was disposed of, the wounds of the negro cared for, and just as the scout turned into the snug and dry shelter the storm burst with all its fury and went howling through the mountains, while the rain came down in torrents.

But the campers were well sheltered and comfortable.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCOUT'S FIND.

The storm howled through the mountains during the night, loosening rocks from the heights, uprooting trees and roaring like a terrible duel of artillery.

In the thicket of cedars the camp was protected, and the horses stopped feeding and sought the shelter of the grove.

It was well that the scout had made a secure shelter, or a miserable night they would have had of it, while, as it was, the two were well protected and kept dry in spite of the torrents of rain, which at times threatened to put out the fire of large logs.

"Well, Beelzebub, our trails to this point will never be followed, and nothing will bring an Indian up here; and there are no palefaces to come, so you can rest content during my absence."

"Yes, sah, I'll be all right."

So the night passed, but though the rain ceased with the dawn the sky still remained overcast, and the wind blew hard.

The fire burned up brightly again and begun to dry out the camp outfit, while the scout got a good breakfast, after putting the horses in a new feeding ground.

During the morning Buffalo Bill brought logs and piled them up close at hand, where the negro could roll them upon the fire, and had he been a brother he could not have been more kind to the wounded black.

The wounds of the negro were doing well, he was getting his strength back by good food and rest, and he said he could easily look after himself and the horses during the scout's absence, for all he needed was close at hand.

The spring was within a few steps of the camp, and the scout hoped for great benefit to the negro from its medicinal waters.

Thus the day passed away, the sun set in a clear sky, and there was promise of fine weather.

After supper the scout tried to get more information from Beelzebub about the unknown gold hunters up in the Lost Valley, wherever that was, but he seemed only to know that they were there, waiting for his return with Buffalo Bill to aid them from some dread peril.

That the black knew more than he would tell the scout was assured, but he would not force him to say what he skillfully sought to avoid doing.

This but added more and more to the mystery about the negro and the people of the Lost Valley whom he had come to seek succor for.

Retiring early to his blankets, the scout intended to make an early start on the following morning, and he had had his breakfast and was ready to go by daylight.

"Keep as still as possible, Beelzebub; dress your wounds morning and evening, eat heartily, and try and be ready by the time I return to stand a hard trail.

"I will be gone perhaps a week, and will bring back with me a brave band of boys, who will follow me to death if need be.

"As you say we cannot ride there, we will come this far mounted, and bring pards to take our horses back.

"I will leave the two Indian ponies here with you, and if I should not return within two weeks, then you will know that something has happened to me, and my advice is that you then go to Fort Aspen and make a clean breast of it to Colonel Crandall, telling him everything, and he will help the people of the Lost Valley as you wish them aided.

"Now, I'll leave you and push right on to Fort Fetterman, striking through the Rattlesnake Hills and thence following down the North Fork of the Nebraska River to the post.

"I have drawn you a map, to guide you, in case harm befalls me, but if alive and well, look for me within ten days."

With this parting talk with Beelzebub, Buffalo Bill shook hands with him, mounted his horse, and rode away.

Looking backward, he saw the negro watching him closely, and felt sure that he felt his lonely condition greatly, wounded, alone and far from a human being that was not a foe, as he would be when the scout was gone.

Taking out his compass, after he had left the canyon, which he did by riding down the stream flowing from the spring, so as not to leave any trail up to the camp, the scout took his bearings and turned the head of his horse toward the eastward, by a little south, to strike the Nebraska Fork between the Sweetwater River and the Rattlesnake Hills.

The morning had nearly passed away, and his well-rested horse had made good time, when suddenly he came upon the fresh trail of a horse heading across his way, and toward a range of wild and rugged mountains on his left.

The hoofs of the horse were shod, and the trail had not been made over a few hours, the scout saw, and he at once determined to follow it.

So, giving up his intention to halt for the noon rest and meal, he pushed rapidly on along the trail.

Miles were gone over, and the trail led him into the deepest recesses of the mountains, and then up toward the summit of a range.

Still on he followed, and, ascending the range, to his great amazement he suddenly came upon a strongly built rock fort there in an unknown wilderness, and the existence of which he had not had the remotest idea.

CHAPTER XII. THE OLD FORT.

Buffalo Bill halted and gazed with wonder at his strange find.

The trail he had been following branched off just where he then was, and did not lead up to the old fort.

Neither did the scout go on at once, either on the trail, or up to the rock structure.

He seemed lost in amazement, and trying to decipher how the fort came there.

It was a rock cabin, he saw as he the more attentively regarded it, rather than a fort, though it had narrow windows and a flat roof.

It was about thirty feet square and very solidly built, being about twelve feet in height.

The rocks were large—square ones had been selected—and it was well built.

Situated upon the apex of a hill, it commanded an extensive view all about it, and could be well defended.

As he drew nearer, the scout saw that it had the appearance of having been long deserted.

Yet the trail he had followed led within a quarter of a mile of it.

But who had built it?

When had it been built?

Where were those who had erected it there in a wilderness?

Why had it been erected?

These were the questions Buffalo Bill asked himself, yet could not answer them.

"My idea is," he said at last to himself, "that it was built as a stronghold by men who camped down in the valley, but retreated here in time of need.

"But who were they, and where are they?"

"I will leave my horse here and reconnoitre."

Dismounting, he hid his horse in a cedar thicket, and, rifle in hand, slowly ascended the hill.

As he reached the rock stronghold, there seemed desolation and desertion alone to rest there.

He stepped close up to the door, which had been built of hewn logs, and was hung upon hinges made from horseshoes.

He looked in cautiously, and saw that there was a ceiling of logs, some seven feet high, and a ladder led up to a loft above.

"Yes; horses could be kept below in time of danger, and the men stay above, while they could fight from the roof.

"I can't understand about it, though, for I never knew of a white man coming up into this country, unless it was old California Joe.

"I will take a look above."

With this, Buffalo Bill walked toward the rude ladder and begun the ascent.

But suddenly he was struck a violent blow on the head that threw him down upon his back upon the hard dirt floor, and right on top of him came the forms of one, two, three men.

Stunned by the blow and fall, it was several seconds before he could recover himself, and by that time his revolver and knife had been taken from him, while his rifle had been knocked from his hand in his fall.

But Buffalo Bill was not a man to submit tamely to capture, and by an exertion of his wonderful strength he rose with the three men clinging to him.

One of them he hurled from him, another was dealt a blow that put him out of the fight, and the third was thrown against the wall with a force that stunned him.

Then it looked as though the scout was master of the situation, in spite of being disarmed.

His first thought was to regain his weapons, but as he stooped a voice called from the loft, as a rifle barrel was thrust through the trap and covered him:

"Hands up, Buffalo Bill, or I pull trigger!"

It is doubtful whether the scout would have obeyed this threatening command, for he saw at a glance that the man was not visible, and would fire at random; but as he meditated a spring toward the door the man he had hurled from him leaped upon him like a panther.

Then the others, shaken up by the fall and blow received respectively, rushed upon him, while the one in the loft dropped down, revolver in hand.

"You are a dead man if you resist further, Buffalo Bill," cried the latter, and his revolver was thrust into the scout's face.

Seeing that there was now no chance for him, Buffalo Bill submitted in his indifferent sort of way to the force of circumstances.

"All right, pards, I call it quits; so what is your game?"

Though shaken up by the blow on the head and fall from the ladder, the scout was in fair condition had not the odds of pistols been against him, and he glanced from one to the other of his captors with a cool, searching glance.

He saw that his blow in the face of the one had told severely, the one thrown against the wall was badly bruised, and the third man appeared more than satisfied with what he had felt of the scout's grip of iron.

The one who had dropped last from the loft was all right, and appeared to be the leader.

And, more, the scout recognized the fact that he was in the hands of as dangerous a lot of men as it had been his misfortune to meet in many a long day.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOLD BOOMERS.

The close inspection of the crowd which Buffalo Bill made was while they were binding him securely with lariats, two of them keeping him covered the while, as though dreading another struggle.

He saw in the four men the real types of bordermen, and felt sure that they were gold hunters.

The leader was a well-formed, handsome man, with blonde hair and beard, and was well dressed, as were also his three companions.

"I think I know you," said the scout, addressing the leader.

"Indeed?"

"Yes; we have met before."

"When and where?"

"You are a man I knew in Denver as Doc Miner, and you are doing here what you were there."

"What is that?"

"You are a gold boomer."

"Ah!"

"You led men into Government lands hunting for gold, and keeping the Indians constantly on the war-path to prevent others from coming into the country where you were placer mining, and also thus making the soldiers cautious about scouting in small force."

"You've got me down fine, for that is my business, Buffalo Bill—we are gold boomers."

"I am sure of that; but, if these are all of your party, you are bold men to come up here."

"You are here."

"I am a scout, and my duty carries me everywhere in guiding a troop."

The handsome gold boomer laughed and replied:

"That was well said, cleverly put in, to try and make us believe you are now guiding a troop."

"Are you sure that I am not?"

"Yes; for I believe you are merely making one of your daring reconnoissances alone up into this country, and I am sure of one thing."

"What is that?"

"You crossed my trail a dozen miles back, but did not know that my pard here, Ike Ellis, was following half a mile behind me."

"No, I didn't know that."

"I should have been more careful."

"Ike saw you, though, and he at once cut for our camp by a short trail that took off miles that you traveled following me, and he headed me off on foot, told me who was on my trail, so I rode on around to our camp, and then we came here to bag you."

"Had you not come here, we would have shot you from the roof."

"That means that all of your band are here."

"We are enough."

"You did not build this rock cabin?"

"Oh no."

"It was built by a band of gold boomers years ago, and one only escaped, and he told me about it when he was dying from a bullet wound he got in a fight in Cheyenne, and I was kind to him."

"What became of the others?"

"They were killed by Indians, and we found their bones here when he came, and buried them in the valley near our camp."

"He told you, too, there was gold here?"

"Oh, yes, or I would not have come."

"He intended to get up a party and return here, but death crushed him, and we came."

"How long have you been here?"

"Nearly a year."

"Must have been successful."

"Yes, we have done well, and are all ready to start for the settlements with our find."

"Indians have not troubled you?"

"No."

"When do you start?"

"Ike and I were returning from gathering up some gold pockets we had hidden away, when he saw you, and we are to start at dawn to-morrow, so you came just in time."

"In time to find you breaking the laws in coming here as gold boomers."

"Yes, and that is not all."

"What else?"

"You have come to find your grave here."

"That means that you intend to kill me?"

"You are cool about it, certainly."

"I take things as they come."

"Yes, you've got to die, Buffalo Bill," said Ike Ellis, and the other two chimed in with him in the same assertion, the leader remaining silent.

"What have you against me?" asked the scout, with the utmost coolness.

"Simply that you are an officer of the law, as an army scout; we are law-breakers."

"I have seen you before, and so have my pards, and we would be caught up and hanged, perhaps, for being gold hunters in the forbidden country."

"You have found us, discovered our secret, and though we admire you as a man of nerve, and of deserved fame as a scout, self-preservation is nature's first law, and to protect ourselves we must take your life."

"How can I, single-handed, harm you?"

"You could go to Fetterman and send couriers to the different posts to cut us off, and thus we would lose all, it might be have to fight for our lives."

"Suppose I pledged my word not to betray you."

"I'll take your word, Buffalo Bill," frankly said Doc Miner, the leader.

But the others shouted savagely:

"No, no; we will not take any man's word."

"He must die!"

CHAPTER XIV. THE COMPROMISE.

Buffalo Bill did not flinch under the cries of the other men for his life. He realized that the leader was far the best of the lot, and he knew but too well that men who had risked life to get gold would not allow a life to stand between them and their successfully carrying it away.

The leader seemed alone then in his willingness to accept his pledge not to betray them.

A glance into the faces of the other three showed that they would be merciless.

The scout knew that their camp was not far away, down in the valley.

Were there others there? This he could not tell, but he would try and find out, and as cleverly as he could.

If there were others they might take sides with their leader.

Buffalo Bill realized most fully that his situation was a desperate one.

The chances were a hundred to one against him.

But he was not one to give up while there was a spark of life left.

So he said:

"Well, captain, your men here, seem to side against taking my pledge, but perhaps the rest of your band would take sides with you."

"You know I do not care to be killed if I can help it."

"There is but one man in camp, for one never came up here, and only five of us entered this country gold hunting," said the leader.

"And Drake Jones would ride with us, cap'n," said Ned Turner, one of the men, while Jake Dunn, who had been the one most hurt in his struggle with the scout, and was nursing his bruises, said:

"Yes, we are four against yer, Doc, and having risked life ter get the gold we has, I don't see why we should let a man go free to betray us."

"My sentiments exactly."

"Kill him, say I," chimed in the others.

The leader showed no sign of yielding, however, and said earnestly:

"Pards, go slow."

"I grant all that you say; and I have just as much at stake as you have—yes, more, for it was my secret that brought you here, and I get one-third of the dust, as you all agreed."

"Now, this is no ordinary man that you would kill, but one that is doing his duty as an army officer."

"You all know who Buffalo Bill is; that he has won a great name, and has risked his life a thousand times for others."

"He has saved hundreds of lives, has stood between the Indians and the settlers, has put down lawlessness, and is the King of Bordermen."

"I ask you, therefore, to spare his life, to accept his pledged word that he will not betray us if we will spare his life, and not have it upon your consciences that you cruelly killed a man who was at your mercy, and that man Buffalo Bill."

"You will feel better for it afterward, and the more enjoy the gold you have risked so much to get."

"Now, pards, prove yourselves men and do as I ask you—for this man will never beg for his life; he is not built that way."

The words of the leader were a strong appeal for the life of the scout, and they were earnestly uttered.

But there was no relenting in the stern faces of the gold boomers.

They were gold mad; they had made their fortune, and it should not be taken from them.

They would take no chances.

Though admitting the truth of their leader's argument in favor of Buffalo Bill; though sorry, indeed, that he happened to be the man who had fallen into their power, they would not allow him to go free, and thus have the chance to betray them.

"No, Doc, he may mean to keep his word now, when his life's at stake, but when we let him go, then he'll forget it and make for the fort to betray us, and we can't travel fast, you know, as we only has two horses left," said Ned Turner.

"Then we wants his horse, too, and his outfit, cap'n," added Jake Dunn.

"Yes, he's got to die," put in Ike Ellis savagely.

The leader seemed deeply pained, and looked at Buffalo Bill, who still showed an iron nerve.

"I am awful sorry, Buffalo Bill, and I mean it."

"Why, pards, I'll give up half of my find if you spare him," said Doc Miner.

"Indeed, I thank you, sir, and appreciate your kindness, but if you gave up all these men would not yield, for it's blood they want now."

"That's it, and your life we are going to have," said Ike Ellis.

"Allow me to suggest a compromise," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"What is it?" eagerly asked the leader.

"These men fear that I will betray them, they say, and that is why they wish my life."

"As I do not care to go out of life at the will of several desperadoes, I suggest that you put it out of my power to do you harm—that is, take my horse and leave me afoot, and by the time I can get to a fort you can have reached safety."

"Good! I accept the compromise," cried the leader.

But the men still looked black and threatening.

CHAPTER XV. THE TERMS.

The eager acceptance of the compromise offered by Buffalo Bill for saving his life was not well received by Ike Ellis and the other gold boomers.

They did not seem to trust the scout, it even left on foot.

"I say no," said one.

"I am with you."

"He's like the old lady's gun—dangerous without lock, stock, or barrel," said the third.

"Your men wish my life, I see," Buffalo Bill remarked calmly to the leader.

The face of Doc Miner became a study.

It grew stern and determined, and the scout saw that he was making up his mind to some act, and his men saw it, too.

Handsome as a picture, he had that in his face that denoted nerve and strong will.

He had come to the mines to make a fortune, but luck had gone against him in gold-digging.

Going alone into the mountains, he had struck it rich, as he supposed, but after piling up a fortune he went to the camp for help to get his metal to market.

It was not gold.

It had the look of it, but was worth nothing.

Then he had begun to practice medicine, and it paid him fairly well, as he only collected a fifth of the money he earned.

Next had come the secret of the fatal expedition and the rock fort, told by the sole survivor when he was dying.

Doc Miner, with four companions, had then started for the new Eldorado.

It would be hard for him to be ruined by a kind act, releasing Buffalo Bill.

Still, he would do so, and he had so made up his mind.

"Pards, you appear to wish the life of Buffalo Bill, not to escape with our gold," he said, quietly.

"We intend to make sure we get what we've earned, cap'n," said Ike Ellis.

"I have offered you half of my gold, and the scout has said we could take his horse, leaving him afoot, and now I tell you right here that the compromise he offers goes."

"Does that mean that you go against us, Doc Miner?"

"Yes, Ike Ellis, for you shall not kill Buffalo Bill without cause, when it is in your power to escape without his doing you harm."

"I think we'll take issue with you, cap'n; for, having got the gold, I take no chances."

"Ike is right."

"Yes, I say the same."

The face of Doc Miner did not change as he said:

"It was my secret that got you the gold, and I brought you here."

"I put up the money for all of you, your horses and outfit, and I have more to lose than any of you."

"For eight years I have struggled hard in this country, and I can see rest and luxury ahead of me now, when I return to my home in Alabama; but I tell you right here, and I am in deadly earnest, that I will kill the man who attempts to take the life of Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, leave him on foot, if you will, here in this wilderness, alone, and far from any help, and with his horse we can make good time and escape before he can put the soldiers on our trail; but, again I tell you, if my life is the forfeit, the man

who attempts to kill him dies by my bullet."

There was no mistaking the words of the man.

He meant just what he said, and was ready to sacrifice his life in defense of the scout.

The men knew him, and saw that he quietly stepped before the scout, to shield him.

They looked at each other, then at their bold leader, then at the scout.

"Say, pards, if some of us dies, there remains yet the more gold.

"Shall we take the chances to see who goes and who stays?" said Ike Ellis.

The other two men did not answer, but Buffalo Bill remarked drily:

"It is my idea that it will be the man in your camp that gets the boodle, for your captain has got the draw on you, and he can drop two of you, anyhow, before he goes under—perhaps three—and it would not surprise me, with my usual good luck, to escape free and fall heir to the gold myself."

The men looked at him in amazement, and Doc Miner said admiringly:

"You are certainly a cool one, Buffalo Bill."

The others thought so, too; but, as Ike Ellis was not backed up in his intention to let the one who remained alive get the gold, he wavered and said:

"Well, cap'n, I'm not the man to wish to turn against you, and I'll offer a compromise."

"Name it."

"And I mean it; and say take Buffalo Bill's horse, outfit, weapons, and all, and give him his life, while we go on."

"And leave him to die of starvation, without covering at night, or a weapon to defend himself with—no!" indignantly said Doc Miner.

But Buffalo Bill broke in with:

"I accept the terms!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"What! do you mean that you are willing to be left here in this wild country alone, unarmed, without food?"

"Yes, Captain Miner."

"Why, it will serve the purpose these men desire—be your death."

"No; for I can go several days without food, and, though walking is too much like work to be enjoyable, I can reach the fort in three or four days."

"But at night?"

"I can build a fire to keep warm."

"But you are not to have a match" said Ike Ellis.

"All right; I won't build a fire, then."

"But you will have nothing to protect you from wild beasts."

"I'll risk them."

"Say, cap'n, we've given him his chance—he accepts—so what's the use of your chipping in any more?" said Ike Ellis.

With a bound Doc Miner confronted the man, and his eyes were ablaze as he said:

"You utter another word, and I will kill you so help me Heaven, if it's the last act of my life."

Buffalo Bill has accepted the compromise, a cowardly one for you to offer; but I tell him right here, if he refuses I will stand by him."

Ike Ellis was cowed. He felt he had gone too far.

A quick glance at his two pards told him that the act of their captain had also subdued them, so he simply held up his hands in token of surrender.

He was really afraid to risk reply with those burning eyes before him.

"Buffalo Bill, I would see you better treated, but rather than have a deadly scene here, I yield to the compromise which you accept."

"We are all ready to start, or soon will be, so here you are to remain until we pack up and get off; but you are to remain bound until the last moment."

"I am content, sir."

"I accept the situation as it is."

"Jake, go after the scout's horse and bring him here, and you, Ned, go to the camp and tell Drake Jones we start within half an hour upon the trail."

"Ellis, you go over the range to the grazing ground, saddle our two horses and bring them here, and with Buffalo Bill's horse we can travel along pretty well, carrying our gold and outfit, and having one animal to ride by turns and rest us."

Ike Ellis looked as though he intended to resent the order, but his two companions had already started off to obey, and he sullenly went his way.

"Well, sir, I owe you my life, and that I am one to appreciate a favor I believe you know," said Buffalo Bill when the leader remained alone with him.

"I have done no more than humanity demanded, and, let me tell you right now, that I happen to have a little food in my pocket yonder, and shall place it for you in the old fort here, along with one of my revolvers, a few rounds of ammunition, and a knife."

"You are certainly a friend in need."

"When I leave the camp, I will, if I can do so without being seen—for I do not wish trouble—leave you a blanket, so you will have something to cover you by night."

"I will not forget you, Doc Miner," said the scout, earnestly.

The gold boomer then did as he said, leaving some bread and boiled venison hidden away, with a revolver and a heavy clasp-knife, calling to Buffalo Bill to see where he put them.

By this time the man had returned with Buffalo Bill's horse, and soon after up came Ellis with the two animals belonging to the gold boomers, and the only two that were left of the seven they had brought with them.

"Say, Buffalo Bill, we want your coat and whole outfit, for the terms are that you are left nothing," Ike Ellis said, with a quick glance at the leader.

"Except my life—thanks," returned Buffalo Bill, with a sarcastic smile.

"You are lucky to get that, for this is a case of life and death with us, and only because the captain is chicken-hearted you are allowed to live."

"I am not one to say die, Ike Ellis, and some day we may meet again—in fact, I am sure we will, for you are one of those men whom prosperity will ruin, and you'll yet die on this border, and with your boots on, mark my words."

"That's a threat, Buffalo Bill," savagely said Ellis.

"Oh, no, only a prediction; for I've met your kind often before, and know what their fate has been."

The man laughed rudely, and replied:

"Well, I won't quarrel with a dying man; for, if you don't starve to death, the mountain lions will make a feast of you."

"I've got nothing against you, except that you came between us and our success."

"Come, sir, we have had talk enough."

"Mount your horse and go on to camp," and Doc Miner stepped forward and took the bridle rein of the scout's horse, the latter remarking:

"I will make you a present of my horse and outfit, Doc Miner."

"I accept the gift with thanks," was the answer, and Ike Ellis grew black with rage, for his eye was already upon the scout's horse for himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEFT ALONE.

"Have you any papers, or any little thing you wish to keep, Buffalo Bill?" asked Doc Miner, unheeding the look of Ike Ellis, yet careful the while to keep his eye upon him, and his hand near his revolver for quick use.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then I will unbind the lariat and leave you, I am sorry to say, as I never believed I would be guilty of leaving any man, even my worst foe."

"I am ready when you are, and I surely will not be weighted down with what I possess," and the light-hearted manner in which the scout accepted his fate won the admiration of even Ike Ellis, who called out, as he stepped to the side of one of the other horses:

"Well, you're game, and I hope you'll get through, but I doubt it."

"Don't worry about me, Ellis, for I do not need your sympathy," was Buffalo Bill's reply.

The two men with Doc Miner now stepped to their horses, and Doc Miner began to untie the lariat with which the scout had been so securely bound.

It was not such an easy task, but at last was completed, the gold boomer dropping the lariat in a coil upon the ground, as though thoughtlessly.

The scout stretched his limbs, like a man awakening from a sound sleep, and then thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, standing in an easy, daredevil sort of way.

"Good-by, Buffalo Bill, and some day I hope to hear that you got through all right," said Doc Miner.

"Good-by, captain, and thanks for your kindness toward me."

Leaping into the saddle of Buffalo Bill's horse, the other two having already mounted and turned their horses toward camp, the gold-boomer captain waved his hand and called out:

"I will always remember you, Buffalo Bill, as I see you now, fearless in the face of an almost certain doom."

Buffalo Bill merely nodded, making no reply, and stood in the same devil-I-care attitude until the men disappeared from sight down the range toward their camp.

Then he entered the rock cabin and began to reconnoiter.

He saw the floor above, with bunks around the wall, and the trap that led to the roof above.

He went up the rough ladder to the roof, and looked about him.

The situation was a good one for defense, but then those who had built the cabin in the long ago had lost their lives, save the one who had been absent at the time of the attack, and thus made his escape, to later die with his boots on and before his lips were silenced tell Doc Miner his secret.

Curling up from down in the valley the scout saw a column of smoke.

It told him just where the camp of the gold boomers was, and he knew he would have to lose no time in searching for it.

Descending from the roof of the rock fort, he went to where the boomer captain had hidden the things for him.

There was a piece of hoeecake, a broiled venison steak, some matches, a revolver, several rounds of ammunition, and a jackknife.

"I could give Mr. Ike Ellis a rather lively hustle if he returned now to see if I felt lonesome," said the scout in his dry way.

Then he continued to muse aloud:

"I am not so bad off, after all, for there is food enough to last a day, and I can reach Beelzebub's camp early tomorrow morning."

"I am lucky to have the Indian ponies there, and to be able to get another outfit for the trail."

"It will be a delay of a couple of days, but that won't matter so much, after all."

Waiting for an hour about the rock fort, Buffalo Bill then set out for the camp of the gold boomers.

He approached most cautiously, until he saw that the camp was deserted, for coyotes were already sniffing around it.

This told him that the gold boomers had been gone some little time, and he at once went to the camp.

It was well situated, sheltered, near a spring and timber, but with no grass near; so the horses had been pastured some distance off.

A search soon revealed a blanket hidden in some bushes, and in it was rolled a canteen for water, a second revolver,

bowie-knife, and a haversack containing some coffee, a tin cup, and piece of bacon.

"That man is indeed my friend," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he shouldered his treasures, filled the canteen at the spring, and returned to the rock fort.

Picking up the lariat as he went along, he was passing the open door, when out bounded a huge mountain lion which he had entrapped there.

Never in his life did Buffalo Bill draw a revolver quicker, and never fire a better shot, for his bullet entered the eye of the savage beast as he was almost upon him.

"Another debt due Doc Miner, for it would have been the last of me had he not left me weapons to defend myself with," muttered the scout as he put his foot on the huge brute lying dead before him.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE GOAL REACHED.

Buffalo Bill fully realized the close call he had had from a terrible death.

The mountain lion had scented blood from the cut on the face of one of the scout's assailants, had trailed the fresh tracks into the old rock fort, and, doubtless very hungry, had rushed out at the sound of footsteps.

Cornered as he was, he made the spring, and but for the scout's having been left a weapon, and using it with deadly aim, the fame of Buffalo Bill would have ended then and there.

It was a full minute that the scout stood gazing down upon the dead beast, a short while before so dangerous.

"A close call—a very narrow one," he muttered, and he started off on the trail by which he had come.

He knew that he had a thirty-mile walk of it, and a rough one.

But he did not complain, considering himself very fortunate to be able to go at all.

He kept up a steady pace until sunset, and then found a camping place.

Getting out his matches, he built a fire in a secluded place, roasted some bacon, warmed up the hoecake, and made a tin cup of coffee, congratulating himself that he did not have to go supperless to bed, and that, with the large blanket left him by Doc Miner, he had a bed such as it was, and a fire, and weapons to defend himself with.

"I would have been indeed in hard luck had I been left without food, arms, matches, and a blanket, for there are savage beasts in these mountains here, I have had good reason to know," he mused.

Rolling his blanket about him, after throwing a large log on the fire, he was soon asleep, and awoke only at dawn.

Eating sparingly of his provisions, for he wished to guard against the accident of finding Beelzebub gone, he started on his way once more, and before noon came to the little camp, startling the negro by suddenly appearing before him.

"Lordy, Massa Bill, yer done scared me clean white," cried the black, who was greatly startled.

"You may feel pale, Beelzebub, but you don't look it a little bit.

"But I've had a scare, too."

Then the scout told the negro just what had happened to him.

Beelzebub listened with staring eyes, and said:

"Well, I do declar', you wasn't born ter be kilt, Massa Bill.

"But what you going to do now?"

"Have dinner, fit out again, mount one of the Indian ponies, and camp to-night at the old rock fort, for I must push on to Fetterman as rapidly as I can."

"Yes, sah, dat's so, fer it hab been some time since I left de Lost Valley."

"And you feel anxious about those there?"

"I does, sah, and I don't.

"Yer see, dey can't get away, only I don't want any of 'em ter kill themselves tryin' ter."

"I see that you don't wish to tell any more than you have to, Beelzebub."

"No, sah."

"How are you feeling now?"

"Gittin' better right along, sah.

"Be all right in a few days, Massa Bill."

Buffalo Bill then set to work to get a good dinner, for he was hungry, and the negro aided him as much as the scout would allow him to do.

Then he selected the best of the Indian ponies, put on him the saddle and bridle of his redskin mates, took one of the rifles and some provisions, with an extra blanket, and again bade Beelzebub good-by, with the remark:

"I hope I'll have better luck this time."

"I thinks you had mighty big luck last time, Massa Bill," was the significant reply.

The Indian pony was a good one, and could carry the scout's weight well over the rugged country, so that the sun had not set when he rode up to the old rock fort and scattered the coyotes gathered about what remained of the dead mountain lion.

Going then to the deserted camp of the gold boomers, Buffalo Bill, as soon as he had taken the pony to where he could get good grass, filled his canteen and returned to the rock fort.

A fire was built, supper cooked, and then an hour was passed in the enjoyment of a pipe, for the scout wished the pony to get a good feed.

But at last he went after him, and both he and his horse enjoyed the safety of the little cabin for the night.

At daylight he was in the saddle, and all through the day the pony was not spared, save when the scout walked up and down the rugged steeps that he came to.

The Rattlesnake Hills were reached before sunset, and the scout camped for supper on the river; but, after a couple of hours' rest, mounted and pushed on again for the fort, for he had made the discovery during the afternoon that the gold boomers had not only not traveled fast, but their trail was leading them up the North Fork of the Nebraska River, doubtless intending to strike the Overland Stage Trail at Cheyenne or push on to Julesburg.

Feeling that he would not be able to travel fast in his supposed half-starved condition, and doubtless would fall a prey to wild beasts, in his unprotected condition, as four of them believed him to be, they concluded that he would go back to Fort Aspen on the nearest point, if, indeed, he got there at all.

They therefore felt little dread of pursuit, if any, and had directed their trail so as to strike the north fork of the Nebraska at its mouth.

"They are traveling slow, and I can reach the fort and head them off before they strike the plains," and with this intention Buffalo Bill put the pony at it again and rode into Fort Fetterman just as the sun rose, the brave little animal dropping with fatigue as the scout slipped from his back.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SCOUT'S PLAN OF ACTION.

Tired though he was, Buffalo Bill's first duty was to go to his scouts' quarters and call out a tall, handsome young scout by the name of Arizona Charlie and say to him:

"I want you and six men, whom you must pick for nerve and endurance, to be ready to start on a long trail after noon to-day.

"Carry extra weapons, a full supply of food, several pack horses and plenty of ammunition, and the men must know that they will have to go on foot after reaching a certain point to which we will ride, and besides those to go with us for the trip I have in view I wish five men to go along to remain in camp with the horses, and be a reserve force if necessary.

"Remember, plenty of food, extra arms, lariats and five or six horses."

"I'll have all ready, chief, by noon," answered Arizona Charlie.

"Remember, I wish no foot-sore pilgrims, or men who are not willing to go with their lives in their hands.

"We have them in the band, and you know who to pick, so do the work well, Charlie, for this is no child's play we are going on, but a trail from which not one of us may ever return."

"I am with you chief, and so will be every man I select."

"I feel that."

"Now I am going to report to the colonel, then get some breakfast, and after that take a few hours' sleep, for I need it," and Buffalo Bill walked off toward headquarters, Arizona Charlie muttering as he watched him:

"The chief has been in it with both feet, for he comes back without his horse and outfit, riding an Indian pony, and looking haggard, while he is going to start out upon some trail that must be desperate, from what he says.

"But I know just the boys that will stick to him if it's a trail to the infernal regions."

Arriving at headquarters Buffalo Bill was at once received by Colonel Mason, who was an early riser, handed over his dispatches from Colonel Crandall and made a report of his trip, save that he did not speak of having met Beelzebub. That secret he would keep, as he had pledged himself to do.

He simply told the colonel that he had made a detour northward on his return, ran upon a camp of gold boomers, been captured, and of the narrow escape he had had, but fortunately had been befriended by the leader secretly, and thus been enabled to continue on his way.

"Now, sir, I have already ordered out some picked men, and I can head those gold boomers off I am sure, but I wish your permission to allow Doc Miner, the leader, to go on his way, with his share of the gold he got in the mountains."

"He deserves it, Cody, and shall go free with his gold; but the other four we must hold and their belongings be confiscated," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir, and then I wish leave to make a scout northward in search of other gold boomers."

"Then you have reason to believe that some have slipped into the Promised Land?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where, for instance?"

"I shall strike for the Wind River country."

"I hardly feel justified in allowing you to go."

"I will take picked men, colonel, plenty of provisions, extra horses, weapons and ammunition, and be very cautious, and we will be strong enough to retreat if the Indians are too many for us, sir."

"I have every confidence in you, Cody, but it will be taking desperate chances for you and your men."

"I will be very cautious, sir, and I believe the result will justify the danger."

"Well, you have a way of getting out of all scrapes so well, and knowing the importance of keeping gold boomers out of the north country, I will allow you to go."

"Thank you, sir."

"When do you start?"

"After dinner to-day, sir, for I wish to head off that party that made it so interesting for me."

"I hope you may."

"But do you not want some troopers, a reserve force?"

"I think a few men can accomplish more than many, sir, and I will have a reserve at the gold boomers' camp, and go on with the others on foot, for it will be safer."

"I see that you have your plans all arranged, so you can go."

"But remember, do not risk too much, Cody, far better that the mountains be full of gold boomers than to lose you and your band of daring scouts."

"Report to me when you go."

"Yes, sir," and Buffalo Bill went to his quarters, had his breakfast and turned in for a few hours' sleep, for his intention was to push through the afternoon and night, strike a certain point upon the Nebraska River ahead of the gold boomers, and there await their coming.

If there was a trail to show that they had gained that point, then he would push on in pursuit and hold them up.

"I'll just make them think I've got wings on my feet," he said to himself, and he greatly enjoyed the surprise he would give the gold boomers at sight of him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PURSUIT OF THE GOLD BOOMERS.

Again in the saddle and mounted upon his best horse, Buffalo Bill looked as fresh as though he had not just come off of a long and most dangerous trail.

He rode out of the fort at the head of as gallant a band of plainsmen as were ever congregated.

There were in the party one young and handsome giant, for he was six feet four—Arizona Charlie—and then came, all in single file, as scouts ride, Pony Bob, Mustang Mark, Lasso Larry, Gold Belt, Utah Charlie, and Sport Bender among those especially selected, with five others, all good men and true.

There were two large dogs along, half bloodhound, half mastiff, and half a dozen pack horses, all as good as the animals the scouts were riding, each one being an extra if needed.

The trail taken by Buffalo Bill upon leaving Fort Fetterman was to the southwest, to strike the river just about the foothills of the Rattlesnake Range.

He knew that the gold boomers had over two days' start of him, but he had lost no time in his walk back to Beelzebub's lone camp, had ridden his Indian pony steadily on the trail to Fetterman, and felt that by taking the trail he now did from the fort he should be able to head off the gold boomers a little south of the junction of the Sweetwater and Nebraska, or come in not long after they had passed.

"We will keep a very steady pace, boys, for I wish to strike a gold trail tomorrow that will pan out rich, I think," the Chief of Scouts said when they were well started, and his men knew that their leader had big game in view.

Until dark the ride was kept up, and then the men went into camp for a rest for their horses and for supper.

Two hours' stop was all the chief allowed, and then the trail was resumed and kept up steadily through the night, Buffalo Bill guiding with an Indian's instinct of the country in which he travels.

At dawn the river was reached and men and horses, completely fagged out, went into camp for rest and breakfast.

But Buffalo Bill began at once to look about him for a trail.

"Spring on a horse, Pony Bob, cross the river and see if there is a trail there leading southward, of three horses."

Pony Bob did as told and soon returned with the report that there was no trail going southward but a large one of Indian ponies going north, and very fresh.

"Ah! that looks bad."

"How many?"

"Some fifty ponies, I should say, sir."

"When made?"

"Last night, I think; perhaps late yesterday afternoon."

"Then the gold boomers have not passed, and I do not think they have gone by any other trail."

"I will tell you boys my racket when we have breakfast, and then it would not surprise me if those we are after will be glad to see us, if they happen to strike

those Indians whose trail you saw, Pony Bob."

At breakfast Buffalo Bill told why they had come, to head off five gold boomers, and said that not a shot must be fired save in self-defense.

Describing Doc Miner, he told his men just how he had saved him from the others, and the scouts asserted that he should be spared under all circumstances.

More Buffalo Bill did not tell just then, but the scouts felt sure that he had not brought so large a force and come so well supplied merely to catch five gold boomers.

A rest of two hours, with water and grass, freshened horses, and the men were anxious for the trail, so mounting they pushed on, now going northward, some on one side of the river, some on the other.

They had gone half a dozen miles when Buffalo Bill halted suddenly.

His quick ear had caught the sound of distant firing.

All listened attentively, and the rattle of rifles came distinctly to their ears.

On the scouts pushed, and the firing grew louder and louder.

At last, as they dashed around a bend in the valley, the men all on the same side of the river now, they came in sight of a stirring scene.

There was a group of rocks in the valley, and right upon the river bank, while among them grew a thicket of cedars.

In this retreat were men at bay, while charging upon them were half a hundred mounted Indians.

The valley was dotted with horses and ponies slain, showing that the men at bay had fought well.

But the Indians were now closer upon their foes than ever before, and the fire of the defenders had grown more feeble.

The victory was about won by the redskins, for nothing now could check their rush in upon the men among the rocks and cedars, and wild yells of triumph were heard as the scouts dashed into view.

But that triumphant shout Buffalo Bill and his scouts echoed with their terrible battle cry as they rushed upon the Indians.

CHAPTER XXI.

WITH HIS BOOTS ON.

The war cry of the charging scouts was the first intimation the Indians had of a foe in their rear.

There in the valley was a group of a dozen warriors with the ponies of those of the party who were charging on foot, and the dead and wounded braves they had gathered up from the field.

Watching the last charge of their comrades, they had not seen the scouts until they were within a few hundred yards of them.

Then they turned in wild dismay and their cries gave warning to their comrades in the moment of their victory.

The Indians for a moment were dumfounded with amazement and fear.

Then they saw that there were about a dozen scouts, and they still had forty able-bodied braves.

But Buffalo Bill was not counting odds, and he ranged his men in line, advanced at a canter, and all fired as they went.

Their fire was first upon the little group in the valley.

So deadly was it that the few who escaped leaped upon their ponies and fled.

But the scouts moved on, giving the Indians no time to rally among the rocks, and their terrible fire drove the band in full retreat down along the river bank, where they kept in the shadow of the timber.

A chief and a dozen braves rallied for a short fight, and Buffalo Bill shouted:

"That chief has mounted my horse, boys, and I want him."

With a yell the scouts dashed forward, the chief and his braves immediately

about him tried to check them in vain, but they fired wildly and were again in retreat when Buffalo Bill gave several shrill whistles and called out:

"Here, Buckskin, here! Come to me!"

The whistles were repeated, and with a joyous neigh the faithful horse, in spite of all that the chief on his back could do, came at a run toward his owner and master.

The frightened chief gave a yell, and his braves half halted as though to die with him.

But he had no such intention, for, finding that he could not check the horse he slipped back out of the saddle, over the haunches of the animal and, striking the ground, rolled over and over for a dozen feet.

There he lay perfectly limp, and as Buffalo Bill rode up he cried:

"His neck is broken, but see yonder, boys!"

All saw amid the flying redskins a paleface prisoner and two large horses, captured by the Indians and carrying heavy packs.

"It is my rescuer, Doc Miner!"

"We must save him!" and Buffalo Bill led the way.

But the horses of the scouts were about tired out, while the ponies of the Indians seemed to be perfectly fresh and rapidly dropped their pursuers.

"It is no use with our horses, boys."

"We'll catch what Indian ponies we can and pursue on them," cried the chief.

This was done, and Buffalo Bill and six of his men went in chase, for one man had been left dead behind and three had been wounded, others remaining to care for them.

But the Indians had meanwhile crossed the river at the only ford within miles, and at the other bank they found a natural breastwork, where they could have kept back a much larger force than their own.

"We must give it up, boys, I am sorry to say at least for the present; but I would have given much to have rescued Doc Miner, and we may do so yet."

With this, leaving a man to watch the Indians, the scouts rode back to the scene of the fight, the fringe of trees along the bank preventing the redskins from seeing them retreat.

When they arrived at the group of rocks where the gold boomers had stood at bay, Buffalo Bill counted a score of dead redskins and half as many ponies.

But a scout lay dead, too, among his surviving comrades, and three were found to have been wounded, though but slightly, fortunately.

But among that group of rocks lay four of the five gold boomers, and three of them were dead, each having received a number of wounds, showing how desperate had been their battle against big odds for their lives and their gold.

But the one of the gold boomers who was not dead was mortally wounded.

While their leader was a captive to the Indians he lay there dying.

As the scout approached him, his eyes turned upon him, and his face grew more livid as he cried:

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, Ike Ellis," and the scout spoke in a kindly tone.

"My God! how did you get here?"

"But it matters not, for your prophecy is fulfilled, we meet again and I die with my boots on, as you said I would," was the low reply of the dying gold boomer.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ATTACK BY NIGHT.

Buffalo Bill saw that his words had come true only too quickly.

The man who had been so anxious to have him die and whose firm stand had left him alone, as that man had believed, helpless and to starve, had very quickly come to the end of his life trail.

But not by his hand had he fallen. Instead, had Buffalo Bill come only a short while sooner upon the scene, he would have saved the lives of four of the gold boomers and the leader from becoming the captive of redskins to meet with a far worse fate perhaps.

Against a foe when down, a man in distress, dying, it was not the nature of Buffalo Bill to feel any grudge.

So he knelt by the side of the dying man and said in a kind tone:

"I am sorry for you, Ike Ellis, and only wish that we could have arrived sooner."

"How did you get here?"

"I had help not so very far away, and so decided to head you off."

"I am glad to know, for I could not understand your presence here."

"So your gratitude for our saving your life was to destroy us?"

"I had no reason to feel grateful to you or those of your comrades, though your leader proved himself my friend."

"And the Indians got him?"

"Yes but I trust he can be rescued."

"For what reason?"

"If only to show my gratitude to him."

"I will die?"

"I am sorry to say yes, for you have some cruel wounds."

"I can't last long."

"Did the Indians surprise you?"

"Yes, we were breaking camp when we saw them coming."

"We fought them hard, but they killed Drake and then Ned next, and Jake too, and broke in on us."

"I fell and pretended to be dead, as I saw you coming, so they swept on, carrying the captain with them, though he fought like a devil at bay."

"And they got our gold, too, but that pleases me, for you'll never have it, so I have some little revenge against you, after all, Buffalo Bill, and—"

His voice choked up suddenly, he writhed for a moment in agony and then the life-strings snapped—the man was dead.

It was a painful scene to Buffalo Bill, and he arose from by the side of the dead body, by which he had knelt with uncovered head, and turned away.

There lay one of the five extra scouts a short distance off, his hands crossed upon his broad breast.

"Boys, stake the horses out to feed and rest, for there is sad work for us to do here."

"How are the wounded, Pony Bob?"

"All right, chief, for their wounds are not bad, and I have just finished dressing them."

"Collect the dead redskins and we will tie them on the backs of their ponies, lead them to the ford and start them across for their comrades to bury."

"A splendid idea, chief."

"But our pard and this dead gold boomer?"

"We will bury him, but not in the same grave."

"That's right, for Pard Dan was a good man, and that boomer was a bad one."

"Dan wouldn't rest well in the same grave with him," said Pony Bob, and he went off to obey the chief's instructions.

The dead redskins were first gathered up, and tied upon the backs of the Indian ponies.

These were led to the spot where the scout sentinel was on duty at the ford and driven into the river they were forced to cross.

The Indians at first suspected an attack behind this act of humanity, but calling across to them in their own language Buffalo Bill said:

"We send you your dead chief and comrades."

"Pale-faces do not scalp and mutilate the bodies of their dead enemies."

The redskins wondered at an act they could not understand, but shouted in triumph when the ponies crossed the river and came into their midst.

Still leaving the sentinel to watch the Indians, Buffalo Bill returned with the other scouts to the camping-place and buried their dead Pard Dan and Ike Ellis, the gold boomer.

While two of the scouts were preparing dinner Buffalo Bill said:

"Pards, I wish to rescue that good fellow, Doc Miner, and to do so will play a little game of strategy."

All listened attentively to what would follow, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"You, Arizona Charlie, after dinner mount one of the Indian ponies and ride up to relieve Gold Belt."

"Halt where they can see you from across the river and stake your pony out in full sight of them, leaving him saddled."

"Then you pretend to take up a point of lookout, but sneak away with Gold Belt, who will also bring his pony, for he is not in sight of the Indians."

"Return here and we will start at once back on our trail, riding the Indian ponies, for we have enough of them, and resting our own horses of our weight."

"We will go down to the ford we passed, cross and camp until night, when we can move on the Indians and attack them on foot, trying to stampede them in such haste that they will leave their prisoner behind, and that is what we want."

"What do you say, pards?"

To a man they said yes.

A hint of what their chief wanted to do was enough for that band of scouts.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOILED.

The orders of Buffalo Bill were obeyed to the letter, the Indian pony was staked out where he could be seen by the redskins across the river, a fire was built to look as though the scouts had camped there to watch the redskins, and the dead having been placed in their last resting place, the chief mounted and led the way.

He had gotten back his splendid horse, Buckskin, which the force of circumstances had made him give to Doc Miner, and upon him was his complete outfit as left by him, saddle bags, roll of blankets and lariat, while on the ground he had picked up his rifle.

The scouts had gathered up bows and arrows, to carry them along as additional weapons, and there were ponies enough to allow each man one to ride and thus spare his own horse.

The wounded scouts said that they could easily ride any distance, and so the back trail was taken to where the river could be forded.

Here a halt was made for supper, and then crossing the stream the band began to follow along the banks toward the Indian camp.

The scouts held on their way as long as they dared, then a halt was made and Arizona Charlie and Pony Bob went on ahead on foot.

The two had been gone for over an hour, and then they came back to where their comrades stood by their horses, awaiting them.

"Well, Charlie, did you get close to them?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Chief, they have been playing it smart on us while we were doing the same with them," answered Arizona Charlie.

"That is, they have gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Went off doubtless soon after they got possession of their dead?"

"About that time, chief, we judged."

"Then they have twenty miles start of us?"

"All of that, sir."

"And as they had a number of extra ponies along, in spite of their killed and which we captured, they have enough to give every brave one, and their dead, too."

"It would be useless for us to follow them with our force, I think."

Thus the scouts all decided was true, so

they moved on to the Indian camp to stop for the night.

The Indian pony across the river was brought over by one of the men and a guard being placed, the rest wrapped their blankets about them and were soon fast asleep.

But at midnight they were suddenly awakened by Buffalo Bill.

"Boys, those redskins will not travel after nightfall, and they do not expect us to discover their going until after dark, if then."

"They will not think we dare follow them, and they cannot be camped more than twenty miles from here."

"Of course they will follow the river, and I will go ahead alone, and at a good pace, so you follow, and by a dash into their camp at dawn we may be able to rescue that poor fellow, Doc Miner."

The scouts were more than willing, and a quarter of an hour after Buffalo Bill rode away in the darkness they followed.

Keeping up a good pace for several hours, they yet did not overtake their chief, and they were beginning to wonder if they had followed on his trail, when they suddenly saw him riding toward them.

"Pards, they are camped just half a mile from here, and are getting ready to move."

"Leave two of the wounded boys to follow with the horses, and we will move ahead on foot and dash into their camp, but be careful not to fire at random, as you may kill the very man we wish to rescue."

Buffalo Bill and nine of his men then went forward on foot, and they soon came in sight of the camp, right on the river bank.

There were several camp-fires, and the Indians had brought up their ponies and were about ready to start.

But ten rifles flashed together, the wild war cry of the scouts was heard in the still morning air, and a dozen paces apart the men moved forward, firing at a foe only when sure that they were making no mistake.

The attack was so wholly unlooked for that the Indians broke in a perfect stampede, leaving their dead comrades, which they were bearing back to their village, and those just slain, with several wounded behind them.

Thus the scouts were again victors, but Buffalo Bill recalled his men from the pursuit and asked each one if he had seen Doc Miner, the prisoner of the redskins.

No one had done so, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, we have one brave I caught with my lariat, as his horse fell with him, and was wounded, so we may be able to make terms with them."

"Find out, Pony Bob, the worst of the wounded redskins and we'll send him on a mission to his comrades to try and strike a trade with them."

There were found to be six prisoners, with the brave Buffalo Bill had lassoed, not one of the five who were wounded being fatally so, and the most serious of the lot a warrior with his leg broken by a bullet.

"Let us fix him up and make him the messenger, Pony Bob," and Buffalo Bill sat down to dress the Indian's wounds.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE INDIAN MESSENGER.

The wounded warrior seemed surprised at the kindness of his foes to him and submitted in silence to the rude surgery of the chief and Pony Bob, who, however, made very successful work with the broken leg.

Then the chief told the brave that the other wounded were to be also cared for and that he was to be given a pony and must ride on after his companions, hold a pow-wow, and offer to give up all their dead, their wounded and the ponies,

if they would in their turn give up their pale-face captive and his outfit.

The brave seemed pleased at this arrangement, and being lifted to his saddle, started off at a run.

Buffalo Bill at once went into camp where he was and where the river banks and rocks formed a good defence for him.

The other wounded Indians were tenderly cared for, the dead gathered together, now fifteen in number, and several of the scouts were busy preparing breakfast, while the horses were enjoying a rest and the best of grass.

Several hours passed away before the return of the messenger, and then the sentinel reported an Indian horseman in sight.

It was the same one, and he put at defiance the pain he must suffer from his wound.

He had overtaken his comrades, a halt had been called, and a pow-wow followed.

He told how he had been treated, and the offer the great white chief had made, but the young chief, then in command, had told him to return and tell how sad he was to say that the pale-face prisoner was dead.

He had freed his hands and had gotten to the river, when he was discovered and fired upon.

He had gone beneath the waters and was swept away to be seen no more.

And his traps, which included the gold, the chief had them asked about.

That had been lost in crossing the river after their first flight, for the horses bearing it had been both wounded and drowned in coming over.

Buffalo Bill then said sternly:

"I am sorry, for now we will have to kill your red brothers and scalp the dead, so they will be only as squaws in the happy hunting grounds."

The eye of every scout was upon the Indian, for they knew what this dire threat of Buffalo Bill meant to them.

But the brave did not change a muscle of his face, did not wince.

If he had been telling a lie about Doc Miner and the loss of the gold his countenance in no wise revealed the fact.

He did not even glance at his fellow prisoners, but after a moment of silence began to slowly chant his death song.

In this the others joined him.

This appeared to be proof to the scouts that the Indian messenger had told but the truth, that their prisoner had been killed, as stated, and the gold lost.

"Why did not my red brother tell me of this when I sent him to his comrades?" asked Buffalo Bill.

He had been on sentinel duty and did not know it had happened was the quick reply.

As the other Indians had now heard the report of the messenger it was useless to ask them, and the chief said in a disappointed tone:

"I fear we have overreached ourselves, pards; but we can do nothing, though somehow I do not believe this redskin messenger's story."

But the other scouts thought differently, and so Buffalo Bill turned to the redskin and said:

"Let my red brother know that we will not kill our foes or mutilate the dead.

"He is wounded and needs rest, so can remain here, while his brother who is unhurt can return to the band and tell them to come back after their comrades and their dead; but some of their ponies we will keep.

"I will take my young men across the river, and let my red brothers return at once to their village.

"If they refuse I will send the braves from the fort upon their trail."

The death song had quickly ceased, and the prisoners seemed only too happy at the mercy shown them.

The brave whom Buffalo Bill had lassoed was then given a pony and told to go after his comrades and bring them back, and the scouts left the dead and

wounded in camp to await their coming, while they recrossed the river and went into camp.

This time the messenger was gone but an hour, and the redskins came back by twos and threes, as though dreading a trap.

But their wounded companions called to them that the scouts were not in ambush, and the braves were still rapidly coming up and they lost no time in getting away.

As they filed away in the distance Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, pards, we have not done so badly, for we have killed more Indians than we had men, wounded as many more, and broken the spirit of the band, while their chief is among the dead.

"Though we did not capture the gold boomers, we know that they did not escape with their treasure.

"Now, I have more work for you to do."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE AMBUSH.

Arizona Charlie and Pony Bob were the two who crossed the river and kept watch upon the Indians.

There was no telling just what they would do.

Still outnumbering the scouts over three to one, they might halt on their trail, return by night, and make an attack upon their foes, whom they would expect to surprise.

But toward sunset Pony Bob returned to say that the Indians had kept steadily on in their retreat, and Arizona Charlie would follow them until dark and then get near enough to try and hear what they talked about, or in some way discover what their plans were.

He would also try and do what the chief had particularly requested, to see if they still had their prisoner, Doc Miner, and the two large horses that had been carrying the gold, for Buffalo Bill was still doubtful of the story of the gold boomer's death and the drowning of the two animals in the river in crossing.

Feeling assured that the Indians if honest in their retreat would keep on to the junction of the two rivers to the north, and hold on to the head waters of the Powder River, where there villages were, Buffalo Bill was anxious to get on his way back to the lone camp of Beelzebub, and carry out his plan to go to the Lost Valley with the negro.

To get an early start, he decided to cross the river and camp several miles further on the Indian trail, which the scouts would have to follow until they branched off toward the Sweetwater.

This would also cause Arizona Charlie to meet them on his return trail, whatever were the tidings he brought, and if the redskins did intend to come back and attack them, in the hope of getting revenge, they could ambush them on the way.

So the river was recrossed, and a march of several miles made along the trail, when a good camping-place was found just as darkness set in.

The horses had become rested, and if there was no disturbance that night they would all, both men and animals, be in fine condition on the morrow to resume their way.

Supper was over, a guard had been set, and the horses were staked out feeding, while the scouts were lolling about the camp-fire chatting, when there came the sound of hoofs.

It was Arizona Charlie, and he was coming at a gallop.

He had caught sight of the camp-fire, and, riding up to it, threw himself from his saddle and said:

"Chief, that's the honorest gang of red cutthroats I ever ran against."

"What's up, Charlie?"

"They are coming back."

"Ah, we must meet them."

"That's just it, and I know the very

place where they will be in daylight as I followed

them, and noted it as I came back to-night."

"What have the reds decided upon, Charlie?"

"Just this, sir.

"They dropped out just before dark, about thirty of their gang, and I tell you they haven't got many more.

"They picked their best ponies, and, while the dead went on with the wounded in charge of them and the outfit, then waited to come back on the trail and tackle us, hoping to give us a surprise."

"Thanks to you, they won't surprise us a little bit."

"Not much, chief; but we have not got much time to lose, and we want every man, for this time it must be a lesson in manners they won't forget."

"It shall be.

"I will leave the camp here, and one man in charge, while the rest ride for the place of ambush and get into position."

This was the plan, and it was quickly acted upon.

The place of ambush was not two miles from the camp, and to guard against all mistakes the horses were left a quarter of a mile back from it in charge of another of the wounded scouts.

The spot picked out by Arizona Charlie could not have been better for an ambush, for it was where the trail ran down a very steep and rugged hill, filled with boulders on the top and with timber shading them, while below was an open plain.

The chief and his men, ten in number, ranged themselves in the best positions, and each man was well protected by a boulder.

Hardly had they gotten into position when the distant thud of hoofs was heard.

"They are coming.

"We are just in time, pards.

"Let every man pick his redskin and fire when I give the word.

"I hate to fire on a flying foe, but we must give them a lesson this time, for they have detained us too long already, and they will be only too glad to push on to their village after this outbreak.

"They are coming along fast, pards; so be ready for them."

Each scout heard the words of the chief, and as the Indians came into view, like shadow horsemen, every scout was ready for the ordeal.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DEATH ON THE TRAIL.

The Indians were coming along in single file and riding at a lope.

Each grim warrior was doubtless thinking of the revenge he was going to get when they should creep in upon the scouts' camp and strike a death-blow at daylight.

They knew that the scouts had some fine horses, wore good clothes, had plenty of blankets and provisions, saddles, bridles, lariats, and last, but by no means least, a splendid assortment of firearms, with plenty of ammunition.

Then there were the scalps to be taken into consideration, and they would dig up the dead gold boomers and get their scalps also.

It was to be a grand wipe-out, for it would take much to get complete revenge for all they had suffered.

Such was doubtless in their minds as they cantered on—to death.

Another moment and they had reached the base of the hill, or rather the young chief in the lead had.

He drew his pony to a walk.

The others came up and the climb up the steep began, the braves still mounted, for an Indian never spares his horse as does a white man.

Like a squaw, the Indian pony is expected to do the work demanded of him—to go until he drops.

The young chief was not twenty-five feet from the muzzle of Buffalo Bill's rifle, and his braves were crowding close upon the heels of his pony, when, like a trumpet blast, came the command:

"Let them have it!"

A half-score of flashes lit up the dark side of the hill, a mingled roar, and the death volley had done its work.

"To your revolvers, men!"

Then, as the mass of ponies and horses was hurled back down the hill, the revolvers of the scouts rattled viciously, and wild cries were heard echoing far and wide.

In one wild rush the braves not killed wheeled and sped away in terror, and the dead and dying alone were left upon the field.

Not a shot had been fired by the redskins, so complete was their surprise, so great was their terror.

One-fourth of their number had fallen, and among them were several wounded braves.

To one of them who could ride, Buffalo Bill said:

"Go after your comrades, and tell them to come back for their dead.

"We will not disturb them unless they again attempt treachery.

"Your two chiefs have fallen, nearly half of your band that attacked the gold boomers have been killed or wounded.

"The pale-face braves of Paehaska* hit hard, and they will track the red warriors to their villages and strike a blow, if they do not go on their trail now without looking back.

"Paehaska has spoken; let the ears of my red brothers be open to hear."

The Indian was only too glad to hear and be off, for he sent his pony away at a run.

Doing what they could for the wounded, the scouts then fell back, Buffalo Bill and Arizona Charlie remaining to watch what the redskins would do.

They had not long to wait before a peculiar cry was heard out on the plain.

It was answered by one of the wounded braves.

Soon after a voice was heard nearer, and a question was asked and answered.

Then first one, then two, and other horsemen appeared in sight, coming toward the hill.

They came with the greatest caution, although expecting to be greeted with a volley, until one of the wounded braves called to them that the pale-faces were gone.

Even then they were not over-bold.

But after a while they had gathered up their dead, put them on ponies, mounted the wounded warriors, and begun their retreat.

As they moved off fear impelled them into quickening their pace, and as they disappeared in the darkness on the plain they were in a run.

"They'll bother us no more, Charlie."

"No, indeed, chief."

"Let me tell you what I saw by the flashes of our rifles."

"Yes."

"That young chief I killed was mounted upon one of the large horses of the gold boomers, and that proves the Indians lied in saying that both of the animals were drowned."

"It certainly does, chief."

"Now, why can they not also have lied as to the gold boomers' attempted escape and death in the river?"

"Maybe they did."

"I did not really believe he was dead, though he might be.

"If he is a prisoner, we can do nothing to save him now, and they'll make short work of him once they get him to their village."

"They will mighty quick."

"Yet somehow I have a feeling that I will meet that man Doc Miner again; but, come, let us return to camp, for we can still get a fair night's rest, and all can turn in, for there is no need of a guard now," and Buffalo Bill and Arizona Charlie started for camp, assured that that band of Indians would give them no more trouble.

*The name given to Buffalo Bill by the Indians.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BACK TO THE LONE CAMP.

The scouts pulled out of their camp at sunrise the next morning, all now confident that a long trail was before them; for, though Buffalo Bill had not yet told them what his plans were, they felt sure, from the quantity of provisions and extra ammunition brought along, and the direction in which their chief was heading them, that it was no ordinary scouting expedition that they had started upon.

So far, they had had adventure and excitement galore, and yet Buffalo Bill had hinted that it was only child's play to what was before them.

Branching off from the Indian trail they had followed along the river, Buffalo Bill took a northwesterly direction toward the Sweetwater.

They had put upon the four Indian ponies they had brought along with them the work of carrying the pack-saddles, leaving their own extra horses free to use as any one might be needed.

The animals had become well rested again, and were becoming hardened to the rough and hard riding.

Buffalo Bill was more than pleased at getting back his splendid horse Buckskin, but he was constantly feeling regret that they had not been able to rescue Doc Miner, after the debt of gratitude he owed to him.

He felt, however, that the gold boomer captain had recognized him, and had known that he had done all in his power, with so small a force, to rescue him.

Then, too, the belief would come to the scout that the gold boomer was not dead, and would yet escape from his captors.

"He is very clever, a splendid plainsman, brave as they make them, and with an iron nerve; so, if the Indians did not tell the truth about his having been killed in escaping, he will puzzle them to hold him a prisoner long," he said to Arizona Charlie.

The ride during the day was not a fast one, or a very long one.

With three of his men wounded, though slightly, Buffalo Bill spared them all he could.

An early camp was made on a creek a number of miles from the Sweetwater, and the chief was anxious to cover his trail all that he could, and go through a country the Indians would not enter without some good reason.

He did not care to leave a trail that a band of Indians might find and follow.

When the Sweetwater was reached the next day and crossed, the trail led northward, and that night the camp of the gold boomers near the rock fort was reached.

"Pards, this is to be our reserve camp for some time.

"You can herd the horses up the range, where the pasturage is fine, but I would advise you drive them in at night and take possession of this pile of rocks, for you could hold it against a big force of redskins.

"I shall leave here before dawn and go alone; but I hope to be back to-morrow night—perhaps not until the following day, for it depends upon the condition in which I find my man.

"Five of you are then to remain in this camp, and the rest will go with me up toward the Big Horn country, and I'll now tell you that our guide will be a black man."

The scouts all looked surprised at this, but Buffalo Bill continued:

"In a certain way he will be our guide, for we are going upon a blind trail, and he is himself lost.

"But he came from a camp in the Big Horn country, where there are men, women, and children gold-hunting, and they are not only lost, but they are in a valley that is unknown to any one so far as I can learn.

"I believe my black friend, who rejoices in the devilish name of Beelzebub, has told the truth, so far as he either knows or dare do it.

"He came for help for the others, who

are in some danger, but what he will not tell.

"He was sixty-seven days wandering among the mountains, and I found him when on my way to Fort Aspen, or rather he found me, only he was half-starved, wounded, and suffering, and had his dead Indians about him to show what the trouble was.

"He is in a lone camp, where I left him—or I hope he is—and I am going after him, and going alone.

"If he is able to go, we will start upon our return to find this lost valley, and we will go on foot."

This was another surprise to the scouts, but they uttered no word against it, and were glad that their chief had let them into his confidence.

That night they slept in the gold boomers' camp, but stated that they would the next day put the rock fort in fine condition for their home.

Before dawn Buffalo Bill arose, and, mounting Buckskin, who knew the trail, he quietly rode out of the camp, and when the men arose he was over half-way to the lone camp where he had left the negro.

He rode at a good pace, hoping to get there for an early breakfast, so that he could start back with Beelzebub, take it slowly, and return to the rock fort that night.

At last he reached the lone camp.

But he received no greeting.

The camp was deserted.

The negro was gone!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DESERTED CAMP.

Buffalo Bill's first act, on making the discovery that the negro was gone, was to bring his rifle around ready for use and to run his eyes over the whole scene, for there might be a foe lurking near, was the thought that entered his mind.

He could not understand the absence of the negro.

The time he had set for his return had not expired.

Had the man been deceiving him, and, less hurt than he had pretended to be, have gone off as soon as the scout had left him?

This Buffalo Bill could not believe.

After waiting a while, mounted as he was, and surveying the surroundings, Buffalo Bill slipped from his saddle, left his well-trained horse standing, and begun to reconnoitre.

There was the camp.

But the negro was gone.

There was no doubt of that.

Then, too, his outfit was gone.

The Indian pony was not in sight, either.

Being assured that no one was lurking near, Buffalo Bill begun a thorough investigation.

He saw that the camp had been thoroughly broken up—left for good, as it were.

And the negro had certainly not been gone very long.

The signs about proved that.

Nothing had been left; and there was no sign of a struggle.

The camp-fire was still warm, and, there being little wood there, it showed that it would not have burned long unless replenished.

A search that was long and thorough at last convinced the scout that the negro had not gone alone.

That was assured, for other tracks were seen.

The scout counted six different foot-tracks, and they were made by large boots, not with moccasins.

This was in the negro's favor, unless they were companions of his and he had deceived Buffalo Bill from the first.

"I do not believe that, and am sure they were mere uninvited guests.

"But did they force him to accompany them, or did he go willingly?

"Then, too, where did they go, and just when?"

Thus musing, Buffalo Bill set out to discover.

First he unsaddled his horse and staked him out to feed.

Then he rebuilt the fire to cook his breakfast, for he always went prepared in that way.

His search of the surroundings failed to find any hoof-tracks, save that of the Indian pony.

Getting over with his breakfast, he made a wide and complete circuit of the lone camp.

He made two discoveries.

First, the men had not come there mounted, but on foot.

Second, that they had left in company with the Indian pony.

Then, too, they had come from the northward.

They had returned the way they had come.

They had left the camp the day before, so the sign read.

Having decided that the men, six in number, had come from the northward—come a foot—stumbled upon the negro's camp, and then retraced their way, taking him and the pony with them, Buffalo Bill mounted Buckskin and started off upon their trail.

Had the negro gone willingly or by force was the question.

Then, too, who were the six men in that wild and deadly country?

Were they also gold boomers?

Whence had they come, for their trail led from an unknown country, as Buffalo Bill believed, save to a few.

One thing Buffalo Bill was particularly glad of, and that was the direction the trail led was northward, the way he intended to take to the Big Horn country.

After following the trail for several hours, and seeing that it still held its northward trend, the scout decided to branch off and return to his camp at the rock fort.

If the six men were foes, they were odds he must not meet.

If they were scouts from some of the forts, why were they on foot?

If the negro had been captured by them, then he would need his scouts to aid in his rescue.

So he bore away to the right, and set out at a good pace to reach camp early and have all ready for an early start in the morning.

He was determined to go mounted, taking two of the men along to bring the horses back to the reserve camp when they had come up with those with whom the negro had gone off, whether willingly or not remained to be seen.

Buckskin, therefore, was kept at a brisk pace, and before sunset Buffalo Bill rode up to his camp and was greeted with a cheer.

But all there wondered why he had not brought the black guide he had told of with him.

Dismounting, the chief told his men the result of his day's work, and added:

"We will start before dawn, go mounted, and two of the boys of the reserve force can go along to bring our horses back if all goes well.

"As they are on foot, we can catch them by to-morrow night or noon the next day, at any rate.

"But we must go prepared for our journey northward, as first intended."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PURSUIT.

During the day at the reserve camp the scouts had worked like beavers.

They had built a rock corral in which to keep the horses at night, and with a protected passage-way leading to it, so that the animals could be led into the fort if need be.

The whole place had been thoroughly cleaned, and a discovery had been made that a rock in one corner hid the entrance to a tunnel-like cave, leading several hundred yards under ground to a cliff where there was a spring of water.

As this spring was in the side of the cliff, it could not be cut off, and in case of a siege men and horses could get all the water necessary.

The rock cabin was, therefore, found to be a fort indeed, and Buffalo Bill was more satisfied with leaving his reserve there; for, with provisions in plenty, and water, they could stand a long siege, and he told the men that their first duty must be to cut grass in the meadow for hay, and it could be stowed away in a rock addition they could build, to feed the horses with in case of a siege by Indians.

All arrangements were made that night for a start in the morning, and an hour before dawn the men rode out of camp.

Two of the reserve force went along, to return with the horses, and there were pack animals for carrying the packs the men were to carry in their tramp on foot in search of the Lost Valley.

It was noon when the trail of the six men and the negro was struck, and it was well for the scouts that the Indian pony was along, or they would have found it a very difficult task following the trail of men on foot.

As it was, the unshod hoofs of the pony were not so readily followed, and often the nature of the country was such that no trail could be seen, and the plainsmen's skill showed itself in guessing at the way those they were following had gone.

The trail was come across a score of miles northward of where Buffalo Bill had branched off from it the day before, for he had an idea of the way it led, and took the chance of crossing it far beyond; while, if he did not, he could return to where he had left it and keep on from there.

Not to lose the time and distance to be gained, however, he had ventured, and the result proved his wisdom.

As the pace had been a good one all day, the trail looked very fresh when the night camp was made, and, calculating the speed of those on foot, the chief said:

"We'll catch them early to-morrow, boys."

The next morning all was ready for a move as soon as it was light enough to see the trail, and they were not very long in coming upon the camp where the party had passed the night.

The fire had been put out, to prevent its smoke from attracting the attention of roving bands of redskins, should any be about, but the ashes were yet warm.

"Another hour will bring them in sight," said Buffalo Bill.

And in this he was right.

But, unfortunately for the scouts, the country had changed somewhat; there was a large plain, miles across, before them, broken only here and there by timber matter growing amid groups of rocks.

The plain was barren, too, and if the party had not been sighted it would have been very difficult to follow them from their trail, for it would hardly have been visible.

As they were still returning by the trail they had come, it looked to the scouts as though they had determined to cover up their retreat, and so had sought that very plain, which they knew from having crossed it.

But, as the scouts came out upon the range that overlooked the plains, there they were in full sight.

There were six white men, the negro, and the Indian pony.

They were a couple of miles out upon the plain when seen.

Taking his glass, the chief looked long and attentively at them, while his men stood by, eagerly waiting for him to report.

"Pards, I don't know any of them as far as I can now judge," he said.

Then he continued, talking slowly:

"They have got the pony packed heavily, and that is not all, for they are making the negro do carry a heavy load."

"Shame! and he is wounded as he is," said Buffalo Bill, and he expressed the sentiment of all.

"That means that they are not his friends, pards; and, seeing what I do, I believe they are gold boomers who were making their way out from the country, found the negro in camp, and the pony, and are making them carry their packs; but where on earth are they going in this direction, and tramping back over the very trail they came?"

None of the scouts seemed able to answer this, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, we have got them in sight, and it will never do to lose sight of them in this plain, for we could not pick up their trail perhaps for days.

"If they are good men and true, recognizing us to be white men, they will be all right.

"If they are outlaws, then they will show fight."

CHAPTER XXX.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

The chief's idea regarding the party they pursued was shared by the men.

If the six men were not outlaws, seeing white men following, they would feel that they must be friends.

If outlaws, they would fear capture and show fight.

It certainly looked bad for them to see the way they were making Beelzebub carry a load, wounded as he was.

This showed that he at least was not in league with them, had not apparently gone willingly with them, and their meeting had been accidental.

Why they had, after finding the negro, gone over their trail was what puzzled the scouts.

The latter had not been seen by those they pursued, and they were trudging slowly along over the plain wholly unmindful of what was behind them.

"Pards, that looks like a waterless plain, so we'll give our horses a good drink at that little brook, fill our canteens, and be prepared for what is before us.

"If those fellows do not look behind them, we may get well up before we are discovered."

The men dismounted at the brook, threw off their saddles for a quarter of an hour's rest, filled their canteens, and, their horses having had a slight bunch of grass, they mounted and rode off on the plain.

The men in advance had gotten all of three miles further away meanwhile, and were a long distance off.

But the canter that Buffalo Bill set the pace with soon reduced the distance, and it was kept up until the party ahead were little over a mile away.

"They see us, pards."

It was true, as all could see by the excited movements of the men.

Some one had looked behind and seen the scouts.

Instantly they turned square off from the way they had been traveling and went rapidly toward one of the timber wastes, before referred to.

It was about a half acre in size, rose in a slight mound, and was a pile of rocks overgrown with a thicket.

"They've got a strong fort right at hand.

"We were unfortunate to strike them so near it," said Buffalo Bill.

The scouts were walking their horses now, and were watching the others closely.

They saw them reach the waste, disappear from sight, and what followed they could only guess at.

After awhile two of the men appeared upon a rock that rose above the thicket, and one was seen to turn a glass upon the scouts.

The two alternately looked through the field glasses for quite a while, talked excitedly, and disappeared.

Buffalo Bill still led on as before.

He had raised his field-glass to his eyes and made the remark that six determined men could, in that waste, stand off a large attacking force.

When they reached the spot from

whence the men had looked back and discovered them, Buffalo Bill kept straight on.

He seemed to wish to give the idea that they had not seen the men turn off to the waste.

The soil just there was such that the iron-shod horses of the scouts made no imprint.

If the men in the waste were congratulating themselves that they had not been seen, their joy was short-lived; for, after getting well by, Buffalo Bill turned to the left and began to circle entirely around the thicket.

He was about four hundred yards away from the waste and he knew what his rifle could do; so wanted to find out what the weapons of the six men could accomplish at that range.

Out in the open plain as they were, the scouts would be at a terrible disadvantage, for they could not even see their foes.

The men in the waste, not counting the negro, were six; the scouts were ten in number, but this little advantage numerically did not weigh against the others' position.

But were they friends or foes?

That question was to be decided.

Having circled entirely around the waste, Buffalo Bill called a halt.

Then they all dismounted, the horses were unsaddled, and the chief, with a white handkerchief in his hand, stepped out from the others.

No one could be seen at the motte.

All was as silent as death there.

Walking a few paces, the chief laid his rifle upon the ground, took off his belt, and, holding up his hands, with the white signal of peace fluttering above his head, he begun his walk toward the waste.

He knew that his every movement was seen from the waste.

What would be the result?

"Don't go too far, chief," called out Pony Bob.

"Let me go, for I'm no good if I get plugged," and Arizona Charlie started toward the chief.

"Go back!" was the stern command, and Buffalo Bill walked on.

A dozen more paces had he gone when there came a sharp report, a bullet hit the hard earth to one side of the scout, and went ricocheting along.

It was an unmistakable command to halt.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KNOWN.

Buffalo Bill was covered with fine sand, cut up and scattered by the bullet.

He promptly halted, wheeled, and called out:

"How far did that bullet go, boys?"

"It fell just yonder, sir!" and Arizona Charlie ran and picked up the piece of lead.

"I wonder if that was fired by their best gun," and with this Buffalo Bill held his flag of truce higher and once more moved on.

"Don't go!" came in a chorus from the scouts.

"They will kill you," cried Arizona Charlie.

"If they do kill me, protected by a flag of truce, you men know that it means no quarter to murderers!" cried Buffalo Bill, in tones he knew must reach the ears of those who had fired upon a white flag.

"We know! We'll avenge you, Buffalo Bill!" came in a savage roar from the scouts.

That those in the waste heard their threat there was no doubt.

Then Buffalo Bill moved on again, and a dozen paces nearer he went, when there came the stern command:

"Halt!"

He obeyed.

As no more was said, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Well, I have halted."

"If you value your life, go your way with your men, Buffalo Bill."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind who we are; but you leave this country."

"I have a right here, as an officer attached to the army, and you have not."

"We have the right to protect ourselves."

"I have come to you under a flag of truce, and which you failed to respect."

"We respect nothing."

"Go your way, and leave us to go ours."

"Will you surrender your prisoner?"

"What prisoner?"

"You know well who I mean."

"I do not."

"The negro, then."

There was a silence of over a minute.

It was evident that the words of the scout had surprised them; that they had not suspected he knew that the negro was with them.

"What is your answer?" called out the scout, tired of waiting for a reply.

"We have no prisoner."

"The negro is with you."

"He is a comrade, not a prisoner."

Buffalo Bill was slightly taken aback at this.

Could it be true?

But, no; if a comrade, would he be carrying a pack half as heavy as did the pony, and wounded, too?

No; it was but a game to deceive him, and he replied:

"I know who and what the man is, and demand his release."

"You won't get him."

"Let him answer if he prefers to remain with you or come to us."

"He will not answer."

"Have you killed him?"

"We would not kill a comrade."

"Who are you?"

"That is none of your business, Buffalo Bill."

"You know me, as I do you, and I demand, as an officer of the Government, that you surrender and save yourselves further trouble."

"If you know us, and I believe you do, you must know, then, that we are not men likely to surrender to you and be hanged for our crimes."

"No, we are desperate men at bay, Buffalo Bill, and if you take us, it will be our dead bodies," came the clear and determined response.

Buffalo Bill's eyes were opened by the reply.

In saying that he knew them, he had meant that they were gold boomers.

The reply had proven that they were far worse law-breakers than men who were invading a forbidden land, and thus stirring up strife with the Indians which reflected upon honest settlers elsewhere.

But he wished to know more of them before acting, so answered:

"In a land where white men are few and far between, when they meet they should be friends."

"We saw you, and only your hostile attitude caused us to go slow and greet you under a flag of truce."

"You dishonored it by firing at me, and now you say you are at bay and will fight us."

"Why should you do this?"

"We are not of your stripe, Buffalo Bill, as you well know, for you talk smooth to entrap us."

"Who are you?"

"You don't deceive us by pretending not to know."

The scout was about to reply that he did not know, upon his honor, when Arizona Charlie said in a low tone:

"Go slow, chief; I know them."

Showing no sign of having heard Arizona Charlie's words, the chief returned:

"Well, what are you going to do; talk quick."

"Fight."

"You refuse to submit?"

"Yes."

"Upon no terms?"

"You know that you have no power to grant us terms, and that we would hang as soon as you took us to the fort."

"It is the band known in the South-

west, chief, as the Six Satans, I feel sure," came in low tones from Arizona Charlie, and he added:

"I know that man's voice—call him Snaky Sam."

"Well, Snaky Sam, you have got to fight," said Buffalo Bill in a determined tone.

"Ah! I thought you said you did not know me," was the exultant answer, and a bullet cut through the rim of Buffalo Bill's sombrero.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE "SIX SATANS."

Without an order from their chief, each one of the scouts answered that shot which had so nearly ended the life of Buffalo Bill.

He was a hundred yards nearer to the waste than they were, and Arizona Charlie had told the men to be ready to fire at a word, so each one had his rifle ready.

The shot at their chief carried a volley at the spot from whence the puff of smoke was seen.

This volley beyond doubt saved Buffalo Bill's life, for it was so wholly unlooked for, so quickly fired, that it sent the bullets tearing into the waste.

At the moment he had fired, Arizona Charlie dashed forward with Buffalo Bill's horse, at the same time telling the scouts to fall back out of range.

"Well done, Charlie," cried the chief, and, leaping into his saddle, he dashed back with Arizona Charlie to get out of range.

They had hardly done so when there came several shots from the timber, but the bullets did no harm.

Buffalo Bill was too wise a man to stand unprotected on the plain and argue with men who had shown that they would be merciless.

Keeping at a gallop for a short distance, the scouts halted, and they were glad to see that the shots of their foes fell short, while they knew that their rifles would throw a bullet far beyond the motte.

"Pards, I thank you, for that volley saved me, as it kept those other fellows from firing."

"I only hope it did not kill the negro," said the chief.

"He seems to have struck the right party, his name being Beelzebub, and they are the Six Satans," Arizona Charlie said, and the scouts all laughed at the coincidence, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"The Six Satans, as I understand, Charlie, are a gang of Arizona desperadoes who secretly did a great deal of deviltry, but were found out, arrested after they had killed a sergeant and two soldiers, and escaped from Fort Defiance later by killing their guard."

"They were pursued, but got away, and word was sent to the forts of the Northwest to look out for them, but they were not seen by any one who knew them."

"Yes, chief, that's the gang."

"They have committed more murders and robberies than any band of men in the Southwest, and I knew each one of them before they were known as the secret devils they proved to be."

"They came north, now a year ago, and I will tell you now frankly, it was in the hope of finding them that I came up and joined your scouts, for there is a big price on the head of each one of them."

"They were last heard of in Cheyenne, and I believed that they had gotten out of the country, but it seems they have not."

"Their leader, Snaky Sam, is as desperate as they make them, and they have vowed never to surrender, and to take their own lives rather than do so, when they know that all hope is gone."

"They are the men I have heard of, Charlie, and they must have gone on up into the Big Horn country and been in hiding—perhaps have been gold-hunting and have struck it rich, so were making their way out again, when they came upon the negro."

"But why they should have turned

right back upon their trail I do not understand.

"If that volley you all fired did not kill Beelzebub Black, he is certainly in very devilish company.

"But we are going to camp right here on their trail, to take them or drive them to suicide."

A cheer greeted these words of the chief, and the scouts then waited for orders.

The men in the motte, having found that their bullets fell short, had ceased firing, and all was silence there.

The scouts were grouped several hundred yards distant upon the plain, and with no shelter near.

Far away beyond the motte was a ridge where Buffalo Bill's experienced eye told him there was water and grass.

It was some five miles distant, however.

"Pards," he said, after a moment of thought, "yonder is grass and water beyond a doubt.

"There we can keep the horses, half at a time, and two of you boys can keep charge of them.

"We camp around that little abode of the Satans, having our camp right here, while we can encircle the place day and night.

"We all have our canteens for water, and can come in here to our camp one at a time for food, by day only, for we must keep to our posts at night and wide-awake, or those Six Satans will get our horses and be off.

"They have not much food, I feel sure, and we can starve them into surrender or death, for there is no water where they are.

"Boys, you know what to do; but half the horses are to be kept here day and night, for quick use if needed."

Again the men cheered, and at once set to work to carry out their chief's orders.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BESIEGED.

The camp was pitched on the open plain, but the two men placed in charge of the horses moved off with half of them and carried provisions with them to camp over to the ridge and cook for the others.

As they rode away the other scouts moved off on either side and thus completely encircled the route just out of range of the bullets that might be sent after them.

Their movements showed the Six Satans that they had to stand a siege.

It revealed to them that Buffalo Bill was in deadly earnest.

The chief rode with the two men over to the ridge to see what the country was there and get a view of the land from every side.

He felt confident that there was no water there, that the men were not overburdened with provisions, could not have any too much ammunition, and certainly could not escape from the trap they were in.

If no prowling band of redskins happened along to aid the Six Satans there was a moral certainty that they had to surrender or die, and it would be a great achievement to capture or wipe out the band of desperadoes that no one had seemed anxious to encounter.

Arriving at the ridge the scouts found there a small stream, good pasture land and plenty of wood.

The second camp was pitched there, the horses were watered and staked out, and supper was cooked, Buffalo Bill intending to take it back to the camp on the plain.

Signals were agreed upon as a call for help, one of the two men to be constantly upon the watch.

It was to be the raising of a red flannel shirt for a flag by day, the lighting of a fire by night.

Each morning one of the men was to come out with the day's food for those on the plain and bring the horses, taking the others back.

Wood was gathered up for fires on the plain when a signal at night was needed and, tied in bundles, was swung across a horse.

A pole was taken along for a flag by day when needed as a signal, and with his bag of provisions the chief mounted and started upon his return.

He made the rounds of his men, giving each his supper, and then put the wood at the camp on the plain and ready to light.

He also erected the pole for the flag, and his position was to be at the camp there.

The other men wishing to signal to him for aid were to light matches and all were so placed that he could see them.

Sleeping by day the scouts could watch by night, and each man had mentally vowed that there was no escape for the Six Satans.

But Buffalo Bill was worried about one thing.

He did not understand about Beelzebub.

He had felt assured that the negro was in no way allied with the Six Satans, yet why had he not spoken, for he certainly had heard all that was said.

Had they killed him?

Had the fire of the scouts killed him?

These thoughts troubled the Chief of Scouts, for if the negro was dead, then the hunt for the Lost Valley would be a much more difficult task, for he had no idea of giving up that trail.

It was a mystery that must be fathomed.

The sun was now setting, and Buffalo Bill quietly began to pace to and fro upon his post.

The other scouts did the same, and the horses kept out upon the plain stood silent and discontented, for their instinct told them that there was water and grass where their companions had been taken.

It seemed beyond them to reason that their time would come next.

There on the plain the soil was hard and dry, there was not a blade of grass or a thing that was alive and growing.

Night came on, the further scouts faded from view, then those nearer, and soon all was darkness upon the plain and a silence that was intense could almost be felt by the watchers.

What must be the feeling of the besieged, thought Buffalo Bill.

Men who had raised their hands in war against their fellow-men, who had sought gain by murder and robbery rather than by honest toil, until at last they had been driven as outlaws, like hunted beasts, to flee from justice.

There in that waste, besieged as they were, brought to the end of their trail, they must have cruel, bitter thoughts.

Since their firing they had not been heard from.

That their eyes were upon the scouts the latter well knew.

Were they plotting escape? Were there any dead in their midst?

The darkness shut all secrets out.

Thus the night passed away and the dawn came, revealing each scout upon his post.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NO TERMS.

Silence still brooded upon the besieged outlaws.

There had been no fire at night, no smoke was seen now by day to show that they were cooking their meals.

Could it be that they were out of provisions wholly, save what they had killed along the trail in the way of game.

The provisions, though left with Beelzebub, Buffalo Bill remembered, would have fed the additional six for several days at least.

Far over toward the ridge one of the scouts in the camp there was seen coming out with the horses and breakfast.

He came straight to the camp, and

Buffalo Bill signaled for two of the men to come in, which they did.

The supply of food was for the day and plentiful.

The horses brought out were left at the camp; the others, thirsty and hungry, were taken back.

"Any sign of the chief?" asked the scout from the ridge.

"Not a sign or a sound all night."

So each scout reported as he came in for his breakfast.

Noon had come and gone, and Buffalo Bill raised a white flag on the pole and advanced toward the waste as far as he dared.

The silence then was oppressive.

A shot halted him, the bullet falling spent at his feet.

He waved the flag and he was surprised at the result.

A man stepped out of the thicket and moved something meant to be white, but which was dirt color.

"Ho, there!" shouted the chief, and the scout further off heard his clear tones.

"I'll meet you half way," cried the outlaw.

"Ay ay, come along!"

Buffalo Bill at once walked forward, carrying his flag with him.

The man also advanced, but slowly.

He seemed to wish to have the scout move to the waste than he should get to the other scouts.

At last Buffalo Bill halted.

He had gotten to where the scouts had halted the day before when he had advanced toward the waste.

"You must come here, Snaky Sam."

"I'll come half way."

"I'll go you," and Buffalo Bill boldly walked the distance.

The outlaw advanced slowly and with evident dread.

"Well?"

"What do you want, Buffalo Bill?"

"Your surrender."

"We won't."

"Then we can't trade."

"We can."

"What have you to offer?"

"The nigger."

"Ah! you wish to trade him?"

"Yes, for you want him."

"I might and I might not."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't want a dead negro."

The scout watched the face of Snaky Sam closely as he spoke.

"He's not dead."

"You are sure?"

"He's all right, for we are not fools to destroy our stock in trade."

"All right; what do you want, Snaky Sam?" and Buffalo Bill eyed the man from head to foot.

He saw a well-built man, a perfect athlete, with clothes terribly worn and soiled, boots run down at the heel and full of holes, long, unkempt hair and beard, a ragged hat, and a face that was a study so benign, kindly it looked save when the dark eyes lighted up, and then it was, well, snaky, in appearance.

The weapons of the man were good ones and light, but the rifle was not of a recent manufacture.

The face of the man looked haggard, and Buffalo Bill felt that it had a half-starved look.

"If you'll allow us to go our way we'll leave the nigger safe and sound."

"No, we'll wait and take him."

"No, you won't."

"Why not, for you are as safe as rats in a cage?"

"If you don't accept our terms we'll kill the nigger before your eyes, and then fight it out with you."

The scout did not allow an expression on his face to change, as he replied:

"What good is the negro to us, for he is simply a border wanderer whom I found wounded and cared for, and whom you found later, and have since subsisted upon the provisions he had, for yours were about run out?"

The man looked surprised, while he asked:

"Is not the nigger your pard?"

"He is just what I told you, a poor devil I found half dead, and whom I never saw before."

"I will feel sorry to have you kill him, but then his life must not weigh in the balance against Snaky Sam and his band, the Six Satans, especially when I have you all in my power."

"That settles it, the nigger must die."

"I can't help that, but I will say that if you kill him in revenge because you cannot escape through him, I'll turn you over to one of my men who is very anxious to burn you all at the stake, and he will do it if we find that black man dead."

"Who is it you speak of?"

"Arizona Charlie, a scout from Wingate, on your trail."

"My God! Is he here?"

"Yes, he is one of my men, and it is strange you did not recognize him."

"It is the big fellow; yes, I know him now, so we can't come to terms, can't trade," and the outlaw turned on his heel and walked back toward the waste.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A DARING RECONNOISSANCE.

Buffalo Bill stood watching the man as he walked away, while a strange expression came over his face.

He had made the threat he did, in connection with Arizona Charlie's name, to note its effect.

It had been wonderful, for the face of the outlaw had shown strange emotions.

Arizona Charlie was certainly well known to him.

He was a scout with a splendid record in the Southwest, and when he came up north and had wished to join Buffalo Bill's company of scouts the latter had been most willing.

That the outlaws had had reason to fear Arizona Charlie there was no doubt in Buffalo Bill's mind, for the mention of his name had shut out all possibility of making terms from Snaky Sam's standpoint.

As for the Chief of Scouts he knew that he had no power to make terms with these six men.

They had placed themselves far beyond the pale of all mercy.

Already had they been tried and sentenced to death.

There was a price upon the head of each, a large price upon them as a band.

No commandant on the frontier would accept terms that had been made with them.

Still the Chief of Scouts was determined to take them dead or alive.

He saw Snaky Sam walk away like a man without hope.

When he had gone some distance Buffalo Bill also turned.

He half expected a shot from Snaky Sam or from one of his men in the waste.

But none came and the scout returned in safety to his camp.

The eye of each of his men was upon him.

They wondered what had been decided upon.

A glance over toward the ridge showed one of the men there coming out with the horses and supper for the men.

No terms, pards," called out Buffalo Bill, and the scouts heard and shouted.

Supper was brought out, the horses changed, and the man from the ridge went back.

"Keep a bright lookout to-night for a signal, pard, for something is going to happen," called out the chief as the man rode away.

Arizona Charlie was the scout then in camp with Buffalo Bill getting his supper, and he was told what had occurred at the meeting with Snaky Sam.

"He knew I was on his trail and had vowed to show them no mercy, for they killed my best pards, chief," said Arizona Charlie, and he added:

"What will you do to-night?"

"You think it best to make some move?"

"They'll never surrender alive, sir, never!"

"When they get good and hungry and see that there is no hope they'll end it all."

"Kill themselves?"

"Yes, or come out and kill and be killed—Snaky Sam is a dead game man, chief."

"Well, I believe we can save time by ending it for them."

"How so, sir?"

"The nights are very dark, and by creeping in from our posts upon the waste we can locate and attack them at close quarters."

"I will go in first and reconnoiter, then make the rounds of the line and get the men, and we can win."

"I believe we can, though we will lose some of our men, for they are game, all those devils."

"We may have to remain here for a week, perhaps longer, for the negro has food, you know, and they must have a little."

"We cannot spare the time, and then it is the only way I can see to save the negro, for they'll starve him sure, if not kill him."

"You are right, chief."

"Shall I put the boys onto it?"

"No, for the outlaws might suspect something, seeing you go the rounds."

"They will not expect us to attack and risk a fight with desperate men as long as we have them sure by waiting, so they will keep poor watch, I am certain."

"All right, chief; count on me to be there," and Arizona Charlie went back to his post.

The men came in for their supper one by one, and darkness again fell upon the scene.

Several hours passed away, and then Buffalo Bill began to prepare for his dangerous reconnoissance of the position of the outlaws.

He rolled up several blankets very close, tied stirrup-leathers and stirrups to them, and bound them to a couple of the heaviest saddles.

When completed this made a cumbersome but very secure shield against bullets.

Hanging this with a lariat about his neck, Buffalo Bill walked toward the waste until he got within a hundred yards.

Then he stooped low and began to crawl forward noiselessly, the shield rising from the ground to above his head, and if a shot or shots were fired at close range it would surely check them.

Nearer and nearer the scout crept to the waste until at last he reached the thicket unseen, and crouching there he heard the band of voices not very far from him.

The outlaws were awake if not watchful.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEELZEBUB IN TROUBLE.

Beelzebub was getting along finely after the departure of Buffalo Bill for the post, and he began to congratulate himself that he would very soon be his old self again.

In his fight with the two Indians who had attacked him in his camp on the cliff, nearly starved and greatly weakened, he had suffered more severely than he had at first believed, both with bruises and wounds.

But the scout's skillful dressing of his wounds and kind care, with the rest and good food he had gotten, the negro was rapidly on the way to complete recovery.

"I tell yer," he said addressing himself, as he had no one else to talk to while lying in his lone camp:

"Dat Massa Buf'ler Bill are a gemman what is a gemman."

"He jist fetch me round all right and save my life."

"I wish I c'd tell him more 'bout dem people up in de Lost Valley, but I can't do it, 'cause I done swear I wouldn't do

it, and if I tell a lie like dat de Lord won't take me up ter hebbin when I die, and it do look like I had mighty good chances of going dat way, and sudden, too."

"Now Massa Bill treat me jist like I was his brother, for he nuss me same as I was a chile."

"When he come back den we start fer de Lost Valley, and though I done come from there I doesn't know de way back agin."

"But he do, or if he take me to whar I does know, I kin find it."

"I jist tell yer I is havin' a good time here restin' and gittin' well, and so is dat Injin pony, too, only its lonesome for both of us, I reckons."

Thus to himself talked the negro each day as he lay alone in camp, until one afternoon he had no longer reason to complain of being lonesome.

He was half asleep, half awake, when he awoke to find himself covered by six revolvers, while as many wild-looking men held them.

"Say, nigger, if you blink an eye you are cayote meat," said one.

Beelzebub was a very brave man.

But with his courage he had good sense.

He did not "blink an eye."

"Who are you?"

The question was put by Snaky Sam, who with his five followers had suddenly discovered the pony, while passing near the camp, and a short search had revealed the negro asleep.

"Boss, I'm not much of anybody jist now, for I is wounded."

"How did you get here?"

"Wid ther pony yonder."

"Are you alone?"

"Only me and ther pony."

"What are you doing here?"

"Only waiting to git well."

"How were you wounded?"

"Fightin' Injuns, sah."

"Where are yer dead Indians?"

"Buried a long way back."

"Are you a soldier?"

"No, sah, I hain't."

"I believe you are lying."

"No, I hain't, sah."

"I know just what you are."

"What's dat?"

"You are a deserter from one of the posts."

"Deed, boss, I hain't."

"What are you?"

"A honest nigger, sah, what got lost."

"Who were you with?"

"Some settlers," said Beelzebub cautiously, not wishing to tell more than he had to, and by no means liking the appearance of the six men.

"Well, I don't believe your story, that's all."

"You are a darky soldier, deserted from one of the posts, and got lost, perhaps, and perhaps not."

"But you've got grub, I see."

"Yes, sah."

Turning to his companions Snaky Sam said:

"Pards, we have met a picnic, struck it rich, for here's food in plenty, a pony and a nigger that can carry as much as a horse, so we'll take the back track from here, get our boodle and then make our way down to the Overland Trail."

"Will the grub last us?" said one of the men.

"I guess so."

"We can go easy on it, and kill plenty of game to help out, and which we are now living on altogether."

"The tramp back will not take over a couple of days or so, and with the pony and the nigger to carry the outfit and the dust, we'll make good time to the Overland."

"I tell you, for men half starved and afoot, we have struck a bonanza."

The words of Snaky Sam were received with a cheer, and while two of the men held the black giant under their revolvers the others began a search.

The weapons and ammunition were first hit upon, then the camp outfit and next the provisions.

There was enough food to have lasted the negro a month—coffee, bacon, crackers, flour, meal, and other things, so Snaky Sam said:

"I'll see that it lasts us two weeks, as we'll go slow on it, and in that time we can get back to where we cached the gold, and then to the Overland, for we must average thirty-five to forty miles a day, pards."

"Now we'll hobble the nigger so he can't get away, and keep the weapons out of his way, for he'd be dangerous if he took a notion; yes, we'll keep one hand tied to his belt."

"But now, pards, in honor of our find, we'll have a square meal."

"Say, what is your name?" and Snaky Sam turned to the negro, who answered disconsolately, for he was almost crushed under the blow that had fallen upon him:

"Beelzebub, sah."

A shout of rude laughter greeted the name and Snaky Sam cried:

"Boys, we captured the devil—chain him."

Not daring to resist, with no show of success, the unfortunate negro was hobbled with a lariat, and his right hand was bound to his belt.

Then the men had their square meal, and soon after started away upon the trail they had come, as has been seen.

And Beelzebub kept his own council.

CHAPTER XXXVII. OVERTAKEN.

Beelzebub saw that the men who had captured him stuck to the belief that he was a colored cavalryman and a deserter.

He did not wish to undeceive them.

Not a word had he said about Buffalo Bill and he was glad of his discretion.

The men were gold boomers, that much he knew.

They had gotten some gold, had hidden it away on their tramp, not being able to carry it, as they were used up from want of food.

With the find of himself, provisions and the pony, they could retrace their way, get their gold and manage to reach some point on the Overland with it.

That they were more than gold boomers the negro was not long in finding out from their talk.

The way they talked before him convinced him beyond all doubt that when done with him they would kill him, thus silencing a witness against them.

In eating their "square meal" they had not given him any.

They said they would save his, as he could not be hungry.

Then they made him carry their outfit to relieve themselves.

They had each one of them a small bag of gold along, but they told him that they had been compelled to leave many times as much, being unable to carry it.

Beelzebub was fortunately well enough to travel, or it would have gone hard with him then and there.

That they would kill him if he broke down he fully realized, and so he kept up well on the hard march.

Strengthened by food, the six men walked well, but they stinted the poor negro to just enough to keep him alive.

Beelzebub kept his own council, however, and struggled on.

He knew that Buffalo Bill would soon return and at once take his trail.

He would not be alone, either, but have his scouts with him to make the march in search of the Lost Valley.

What the scout would do pleased the negro to think of, and cheered him on his way.

He stumbled frequently, dragged his feet, and did all he could to aid the pony in marking the trail as distinctly as he dared.

The Six Satans had no thought of pursuit.

They seemed convinced that there was no one up in that country to pursue.

They made good time, made the negro sleep between two of them at night, and were most watchful of him at all times.

It was well that they were, for Beelzebub was equally as watchful for a chance to escape.

The Six Satans appeared as pleased with the ammunition they had gotten, as they were with the food and the pony.

They evidently felt that they had made a great find.

Afraid to trust each other, they were going together to the Overland, get horses and provisions and return for their hidden gold.

But the find of the negro in camp had decided them upon returning at once.

So they went on their way, sticking close to their trail in going back, and at last reaching the plain, a desert, where they little dreamed they were to be brought to bay.

It was the giant negro who first looked back.

He almost made the mistake of uttering a yell of joy.

Well he knew who it was on the track of his captors.

But Beelzebub was cunning, shrewd.

He knew that the pursuers must never be discovered, that they might be connected with him in some way in the mind of his captors, and then his life would be the forfeit.

He was tired, weak and could hardly keep up with the others, for he was not yet himself.

That his captors would kill him if they had to desert him, he felt assured.

So he said:

"Massa Sam, dere is somebody a-comin' on our trail, sah; we better be a pushin' along."

A cry broke from the lips of each man and their eyes told them that whoever they were that they outnumbered them, were mounted and would not be long in overtaking them.

"Pards, we are in hard luck, and just as we thought all was well."

"Push for it, push!"

"Nigger, you saw them just in time."

"We'll make for yonder rock hill, pards."

Then Snaky Sam led the way to the motte, and, reaching it, he at once began to see what the advantages of the situation were.

The pony was hidden among the rocks, a camp placed where bullets would not intrude, and then Snaky Sam and one of his men ascended a rock to reconnoiter.

What they saw did not reassure them, and he said in a low tone:

"That is Buffalo Bill in the lead."

"It has been a long time since I saw him, and I only met him once then, but he's a man not to forget."

"It is to be a death struggle here, pard, so we'll get ready for it as best we can."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OATH-BOUND.

Beelzebub could hardly contain himself with joy at having Buffalo Bill and his scouts coming to his rescue.

But he had to do so, and, more, he made out that he was frightened at being captured which convinced the outlaws that he was really a deserter as they had suspected.

"I is afeerd they is after me," he said in a whisper to Snaky Sam.

"Well, we strike a trade for you if they are, and you bet you are valuable, nigger, far more so than you were in slavery days for you have got to Luy half a dozen lives," was the answer.

When the scouts halted and Buffalo Bill rode forward alone, Beelzebub made the mistake of allowing his face to reveal his pleasure.

Snaky Sam saw it and at once said:

"Nigger, I'm onto you, and I believe you are glad those scouts are there."

"I'll just check your joy."

He was raising his revolver to fire, when one of the men called out quickly:

"Don't kill him, Sam, for he may be worth his weight in gold."

"Gag him and rope him, so he can do no harm."

It was a very close call for the negro, for the revolver was lowered just as Snaky Sam was about to pull trigger.

"You are right."

"We'll see what he is worth to us."

"Tie him and put a gag in his mouth."

The negro made no resistance.

He had had a shock at his close call that had almost completely unnerved him.

From joy he had been overwhelmed with despair when he saw Snaky Sam turning his revolver upon him.

So Beelzebub was securely bound and a stick with his hat over it was stuck into his mouth as a gag.

What followed the reader knows, for the firing upon Buffalo Bill has been seen, with the siege of the outlaws in the motte, and later the meeting of Snaky Sam and the Chief of Scouts.

When night came on the outlaws gathered together about a small fire built among the rocks and where no gleam of it could be seen by the scouts.

In the arc of light lay the bound negro suffering greatly, with his bonds and his gagged mouth, but his groans, which he could not keep back, fell on unheeded ears.

Yet his ears heard all that was said, and he knew that either release or death were near, for he feared that the chances were in favor of the later.

"Pards, you know what's before us," begun Snaky Sam.

A silence that was deep gave consent.

"Buffalo Bill is on our trail, he has hemmed us in, and we might as well think of escaping from a bloodhound as that man."

The men groaned.

"We are cornered beyond escape, and capture means death by hanging."

"It seemed that luck had come to us, for we escaped from the lower country to this, which is rich, and we only had to cache our gold when we could carry it no further."

"Then we struck that nigger, and he gave us a big lift, and would have saved us only we have got Buffalo Bill on our trail, and you know what that means."

"Well, here we are, and to-morrow would end it, for we are starving for water though we have food in plenty."

"If taken we hang, so I say keep our oath this night and at the word send a bullet through our hearts."

Again a groan came from the men.

"Don't be cowards, pards."

"We took all chances and are doomed."

"We took oath what we would do, and though it comes terribly hard, it has to be done."

"There is a big price on our heads to be taken alive, that we may be hanged."

"We'll cut the figure down and be taken dead."

"What do you say?"

A moment of silence followed, and then one said:

"We are six, Sam, and a dash might save one, two or three of us, and we get away."

"Remember we have got gold, and it's hard to die now with life before us."

"Yes, but do you mean that we could get away by a dash?"

"Yes."

"It could not be done."

"We might kill some of the scouts, but some of us would be taken alive; none would escape."

"No, we must keep our oath and die like the game men we are, now that we have come to the end of our rope."

"If any man here refuses to keep that oath I will send a bullet through his brain."

"We won't refuse, Sam."

"Give the word," and all repeated the words in a low but earnest tone.

Beelzebub had stopped groaning.

He scarcely breathed.

He had begun to believe that the men had forgotten him.

He was mistaken.

The next moment Snaky Sam said:

"We'll each one of us put a bullet in the nigger, pards, then a grasp of the hand all round, and then we'll turn the muzzle of our guns against our heads, I'll give the word and then we'll pull trigger together."

"We will," was the firm rejoinder.

It was Beelzebub's time to groan now. He could hardly move, he could not cry out.

An appeal for mercy would have been useless, yet he wanted so to cry out to Buffalo Bill.

"Pards, we'll hide the gold we have so that those accursed scouts can't find it, and that which we have cached will never be found."

The gold was hidden by Snaky Sam among the rocks, and then the outlaws returned to the fire and each one drew his revolver as he faced the prostrate negro.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BUFFALO BILL GAVE THE WORD.

Buffalo Bill had crept into the motte unseen.

The outlaws were so taken up with their own doom, oath-bound to die together as they were at the command of their leader, they did not keep watch.

Not one of them supposed the scouts would take any chances of an attack when they had them so surely by waiting.

So Buffalo Bill reached their stronghold and begun to reconnoiter.

He saw the reflection of the fire, and he gained a rock from where he could look down upon the group.

He counted the six, and felt relieved. Not one was upon guard, as he had feared.

The light of the fire revealed every face distinctly.

It also revealed poor Beelzebub lying bound near the group.

The scout could hear the groans of the unfortunate negro and they went to his heart.

He felt that the man must be released quickly.

What the outlaws were talking about Buffalo Bill could not distinguish, but their faces showed that they were in deadly earnest in all they said.

"I must lose no time.

"Now we can all reach the motte and then we can act."

So saying the Chief of Scouts retraced his way.

He did not need his shield now, so it was left at the edge of the thicket.

Rapidly he walked out upon the plain to his first scout.

It was Pony Bob.

He was alert and recognizing the scout said:

"What's up, chief?

"Bob, go around the circle and bring the boys all here.

"Lose no time, keep out on the circle line in coming, and make no sound to show the outlaws where we are."

"All right, sir."

Away Pony Bob went at a trot, as noiseless as a panther's tread.

Buffalo Bill now saw a form advancing.

It did not take a second glance to recognize the tall form and broad shoulders of Arizona Charlie.

"Charlie, I have been to the outlaws' camp."

"Just like you, chief."

"They are keeping no watch, but are holding a pow-wow, and something is up."

"Good!"

"They are around a small fire, and the negro is lying near.

"I shall return to the timber, but you wait here and bring the men when they all come."

"I will."

"Now I'll go."

With this Buffalo Bill again crept toward the thicket.

He reached the edge of the thicket, and he saw the outlaws gathered around the fire.

The men were all there, but standing up now.

The negro still lay where he had been before, but was groaning more pitifully now.

Snaky Sam was talking louder than before, and Buffalo Bill caught a few words.

What he heard caused him to quickly retrace his way to the edge of the thicket.

Just as he reached there he saw his scouts coming.

They were stooping low, coming in a line and not thirty feet away.

"Ho, pards!"

"Chief."

"We have no time to lose."

"All ready, sir."

"Follow me in Indian file."

"Ay ay."

"Have your rifles ready for quick work, and I'll show you a thrilling picture."

The Chief of Scouts led the way into the thicket, and close behind him followed his men in single file.

They climbed noiselessly over the rocks, and at last reached a point where they saw a glimmer of light.

"In line!"

They silently obeyed.

From where they stood now they could see the six outlaws.

They could also see the negro and hear his pitiful groans.

The outlaws were standing up in a line. They had their revolvers drawn and Snaky Sam was talking.

The men stood with bowed heads and the light of the fire falling upon their faces showed that they were livid, had thrown aside their hats and were strangely nervous.

"Pards, we get what comfort we can in killing the nigger first."

"He is what Buffalo Bill is after."

"Fire at the word as I give it and fill him full of lead."

"Then we'll grasp hands across, look each other squarely in the face to show that not one of us shrinks from keeping an oath, and then when I give the word 'Fire!' pull trigger."

"We will!"

Every word that Snaky Sam uttered was heard by the scouts.

The voices in chorus were also heard distinctly. And the deep groans of poor Beelzebub reached their ears too.

"Are you ready, pards?"

Snaky Sam's voice rang out distinctly and without a tremor.

But it was Buffalo Bill's voice that uttered the command:

"Fire!"

CHAPTER XL.

A DEVIL TO THE LAST.

The scouts fired at the word of their chief.

The roar of the rifles was terrible, breaking in as they did upon the stillness of the night.

The negro was seen to spring half way to a standing position and then fall back, rolling in apparent agony.

But the six outlaws had sank in their tracks as one man.

All lay motionless save one.

That one was Snaky Sam.

The Indian pony, hidden among the rocks, snorted wildly and plunged about in a vain effort to get away.

Down toward the camp, over rocks and through rushes, revolvers in hand, the scouts followed their leader.

The loud tones of their chief was heard:

"Ho! Beelzebub, you are not hurt, for we fired those shots."

The scouts did not doubt but that the negro believed that the outlaws had fired, and that he was full of bullets.

But he could not reply, and only groaned.

Reaching the fire, more wood was thrown on it by some, others pulled the outlaws apart from the ghastly group.

Buffalo Bill cut the bonds that held the outlaws, while Pony Bob began to untie

the lariat from his feet, another scout doing the same to release his hands.

"Here's my canteen," and the scout poured water into the dry and inflamed mouth of the black.

It nearly choked him, but slowly he revived, though he could not speak.

But the scout's words were reassuring, for the negro was told that he was all right; that the outlaws were dead, the scouts had fired that volley, and he would soon be as good as ever.

Seeing that Beelzebub was recovering, Buffalo Bill turned to Arizona Charlie, who had called him.

"Well, Charlie?"

"The head devil still lives."

"Snaky Sam?"

"But mortally wounded, surely?"

"He must be; but you look at him."

Another fire had been lighted, and where there was more room.

Lying near it was the leader of the Six Satans.

He was breathing hard, and his breast was stained with blood.

But his eyes were open and he was conscious.

He had recognized Arizona Charlie, who had placed him in as comfortable a position as possible, and had said:

"Beyond your reach now, Charlie."

As Buffalo Bill knelt by his side there was only sympathy in the scout's look and tone:

"I am sorry you are suffering, pard, and wish you had been as fortunate as your comrades."

"From your lips I believe that, Buffalo Bill."

"But my wounds are mortal."

"Yes, they cannot be otherwise."

"You have not long to live, but I wish to make you as comfortable as I can."

"If you have any last wish to make known I will see that it is faithfully carried out."

"Thank you."

"But I will die in silence as to the past, and those that do not know me as I am need never learn the fate of one, strange as it may seem to you, they love and trust."

"I will simply be registered as 'fate unknown,' with thousands of others."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, and the scouts stood in silence looking on.

The chief had removed his hat, for he stood in the presence of death.

The others had followed his example. Beelzebub sat not far away, sipping water from a canteen to cool his throat and get back his voice.

It was a strange, ghastly scene, one not to be forgotten.

After a short silence the outlaw leader spoke again:

"You gave the order to fire when it was upon my lips, Buffalo Bill."

"Yes."

"You knew that we intended to kill the nigger?"

"Yes."

"You saved him."

"We were just in time."

"When he was dead my men intended to kill themselves."

"I heard your words of how you were oath-bound."

"But I did not intend to kill myself."

"You did not?" asked Buffalo Bill in surprise.

"Oh, no, born a devil, I would have been a devil to the last."

"How do you mean?"

"I did not intend to kill myself, but the others did."

"The men had given me the gold to hide from you; but I left it right over there."

"When the nigger was dead and my men, too, I intended to grab up that gold, run to the edge of the thicket, and when you and your scouts came here on the jump I would have slipped out, reached your camp and, taking the horses you have there and the outfit, make a run of it for where our treasure is hidden."

"I would have had a long start, a number of horses to ride, a full moon, and a good wind, but you would have caught me."

"You would have had a long start, a number of horses to ride, a full moon, and a good wind, but you would have caught me."

"You would have had a long start, a number of horses to ride, a full moon, and a good wind, but you would have caught me."

"You would have had a long start, a number of horses to ride, a full moon, and a good wind, but you would have caught me."

"You would have had a long start, a number of horses to ride, a full moon, and a good wind, but you would have caught me."

"Yes, I intended to be a devil until the last, and have gone my way alone; but you thwarted me and now I'll die with the secret untold of where that fortune in gold is hidden."

"Ha! ha! ha! that will be your punishment, Buffalo Bill; ha! ha! ha!"

The laugh was one full of fiendish triumph, and Buffalo Bill looked at the man in actual horror.

He had seen many a man die, but never one who was so hardened as was this one.

He uttered no word, simply placed the canteen of water to the lips of the man and did what he could to relieve his intense suffering, for though Snaky Sam uttered no outcry, no groan, all saw that he was quivering with mortal anguish.

CHAPTER XLI.

WITH SEALED LIPS.

As the dying man seemed to desire to remain silent Buffalo Bill did not disturb his last moments by asking any questions.

He simply ordered Pony Bob to go out to the camp and bring the horses to the motte, and Utah Charlie accompanied him.

Beelzebub was getting better, but yet spoke no word.

He was busy gargling his throat and between gargles watching the dying outlaw with an admixture of horror and dread upon his face.

Thus half an hour passed away.

Pony Bob and Utah Charlie returned with the horses and outfit, made them fast in the thicket and came back to the fire.

The dying outlaw had not spoken since they had been gone.

He was breathing harder and more rapidly now.

As they joined the circle again the eyes of Snaky Sam opened.

Twice he made an effort before he spoke, and then in a husky tone came the words:

"While I can I'll say good-by, Buffalo Bill, and you, too, boys."

The Chief of Scouts saw him try to raise his hand, and the effort proved vain.

He gently placed his hand upon that of the outlaw.

He wanted him to feel that there was sympathy felt for even him, that he was not dying amid foes, that in the presence of death his enemies had become friends.

The man seemed to feel this.

He struggled to speak again, but could not.

It seemed that he wished to say with his eyes what his tongue refused to utter.

Was he going to reveal the secret of his life?

Was he trying to tell where that hidden gold could be found?

Who can tell?

A struggle, a gasp, and the body of the man writhed in agony as the life spark that had animated it went out like the flame of a candle and melted into—what?

Buffalo Bill bent over, clasped the hands upon the broad breast, closed the eyes, a short while before so full of fire, defiance and pluck, and then said:

"Pards, be his sins what they may, I never saw a braver man."

And this was the verdict of each of the daring men who stood with uncovered heads gazing down upon the clay which the flight of the spark of life had left to crumble back to dust.

The sound of hoofs approaching at a run out on the plain told the scouts that their comrades were coming from the camp by the ridge, for though no signal had been given them they had doubtless heard the firing and thought they were needed.

The next minute one of the two men dashed up and had with him all the horses.

This decided Buffalo Bill upon going to

the ridge right off, carrying the outfit of the outlaws, the pony and all else with them, the bodies as well, for there the soil was too hard to dig a grave in.

The start was soon after made, Beelzebub mounting his Indian pony.

The negro could not yet speak, so swollen and inflamed the gag had made his throat and mouth, and the bonds had caused his ankles and wrists to swell up and be painful.

Once in the camp by the ridge, however, the negro was kindly cared for, and at once dropped off to sleep, the scouts soon after following his example.

Sunrise showed a pleasant camping-place in a meadow under a cliff, and upon the banks of a small stream, and Buffalo Bill determined to remain there until the following morning and allow the men and horses to fully recuperate.

Then, too, he wished Beelzebub to get in trim again.

He was glad to find that the giant negro could speak once more, and the swelling in his limbs had gone down.

The scouts gazed at the black with decided interest.

His giant physique, bold, yet kindly face, and the mysterious journey that he had come upon, interested them.

They could not understand about these people of the Lost Valley, and wondered why he did not tell more about them, and just why Buffalo Bill had been sent for.

Breakfast over, the scouts set to work to dig a large grave for the outlaws, and, as picks and shovels had been brought along, it was not a difficult task.

The bags of gold which Snaky Sam had decided to appropriate were found to be equal to several thousand dollars in value, and this was to go into the scout's treasury, to be equally divided, while Beelzebub was allowed a share in it also.

The wish of the scouts was that the large treasure of the outlaws could be found, and of which the leader would not tell, and they believed that if they kept right on there they might be able to follow the trail to the hiding-place.

This they decided to ask the chief to do, if he did not think a day or two of delay would make any great difference to the finding of the people of the Lost Valley.

CHAPTER XLII.

BEELZEBUB'S STORY.

The dead outlaws were laid to rest in one grave, and then the scouts devoted themselves to cleaning their firearms, patching up bridles and all else that needed it, and getting all ready for the start on the morrow.

A bath in the stream and the dressing of his wounds afterward greatly refreshed Beelzebub, and he said that he would be all right for the march on the morrow.

Lying on his blanket, while Buffalo Bill and Arizona Charlie sat near him, after dinner, and the others were lolling about taking it easy, Beelzebub said:

"Massa Buf'ler Bill, yer hain't ask me nothin' about my leavin' ther camp whar yer left me."

"No, Beelzebub, I did not wish to worry you, and I thought you'd tell your story in good time."

"I did leave there, sah; but I tell yer now it wasn't 'cause I wanted to."

"From the company I found you in, I think not myself."

"I'll tell you all about it, sah, and I does know that as soon as I had got them things I were carryin' to whar them fellers had ther gold hid, they'd have kilt me sartin'."

"I do not doubt it."

The negro then told of how he had been surprised in camp, and all that had followed.

He said he was hoping that the Chief of Scouts would come along and save him, but he feared he would not arrive in time, for they were half-starving him; he really was not able to carry the heavy load put upon him, and he was about

used up when he had looked back and seen the scouts.

He could hardly believe his eyes, and he forgot all about his sufferings at once.

How they sought the refuge of the motte, bound and gagged him, and then of the awful resolve to die together, he made known, and added:

"Now, Massa Bill, I doesn't say I kin, and I guesses I cannot, but maybe I might find that gold, from what I heerd 'em talk about whar it was."

"How far was it from where we corralled them, Beelzebub," asked Buffalo Bill.

"They said as how they'd git there that night, fer it were jist beyond the plain."

"Yer see, sah, as they intended killin' me, they didn't mind talking right out afore me."

"I see."

"But I would like to find the gold again, and we will make the try, unless you think your people of the Lost Valley may be in urgent need of our coming."

"Massa Bill, dey is mighty anxious, sah, fer you ter come, but I tells you, too, they is jist as safe as they kin be."

This was beyond the understanding of either Buffalo Bill or Arizona Charlie, and again it flashed over the mind of the former that the negro might be mad.

He saw, too, that Arizona Charlie had the same thought, and he asked numberless questions of the black about the Lost Valley, to all of which the most vague answers were given, and which but served to complicate still more all that concerned the mysterious story told of the half-hundred human beings who were lost and in need of help, yet were perfectly safe.

"We'll talk to the boys about going on and trying to find the outlaws' gold; for, with a treasure to discover, half a hundred people to find, and a lost valley to look up, we are getting mixed, Beelzebub," and Buffalo Bill walked off with Arizona Charlie.

"Well, Charlie, what do you think of him?"

"He's a mystery, chief."

"You believe his story about these people in a lost valley?"

"If he is not mad, and is not a hallucination of his mind."

"That is what first struck me."

"But he does not appear to be mad."

"No, sir; he is sane on every subject save that, if mad he is."

"But he's a grand specimen of his race."

"He is, indeed, and brave as a lion."

"He has shown that, chief, while what he has suffered and gone through with would have killed a man of less strength, endurance, and nerve."

"I agree with you; but he will be well able to travel to-morrow."

"Oh, yes; now, if you wished to start, sir."

"No; we will start to-morrow morning and take it quietly."

"And will he, then, be the guide to this Lost Valley, if such a place exists?"

"No; I must do the finding, for he has lost himself, and can only tell about where he thinks he started from."

"Chief Cody?"

"Well, Charlie."

"He came from somewhere, and surely not from Fort Aspen or Fetterman, and he was on foot, you say, while he has notched his rifle for each day since he left somewhere?"

"True."

"Then I guess he tells the truth about the people of the Lost Valley, only I wish he would tell us more than he does."

"And yer heerd him insis, that we must go on foot; and, more, black ourselves up, and by so doing we can pass any Indians we may meet, simply going along as black scouts, uttering no word, showing n' hostile act—in fact, appearing like black scouts of silence."

"Yes, sir. I heerd just what he said, and it is a novel undertaking."

"But on foot we will certainly leave no trail, we can each carry a pack for

provisions, blankets, and ammunition, and certainly dodge Indians when mounted we could not.

"I, for one, am in favor of the walking-match."

"So am I; but I don't like this blacking-up business, though I brought along the means to make us as black as Beelzebub is."

"We can call it our war-paint, chief, and go, as you said, as Scouts of Silence, Black Braves, Ebony Ghosts, or anything we choose to call ourselves—why, I rather like the idea of what promises to be a very remarkable expedition."

"And I also do, Arizona Charlie," was Buffalo Bill's reply.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON FOOT.

The scouts were all in favor of going on in search of the outlaws' gold.

Who could blame them?

They worked hard for what was really small pay indeed for the services rendered, and the terrible risks they had to take.

If each one of them could get a nice slice of a fortune from finding the gold hidden away by the Six Satans, they certainly were entitled to it.

By what they had already gotten they had added to their earnings very considerably, and they only hoped that the search would pan out rich for them.

So the next morning the start was made, the trail the outlaws had been following, their own, was found, and every man had his eyes open for the tracks of the men, for they were not easily found or followed.

Beelzebub was mounted upon the Indian pony, and said that he felt all right.

At noon the plain had been crossed and the trail entered the mountains.

There were the six tracks of the worn boots, the wearers then in their grave, and they led up a canyon, and Beelzebub said that the outlaws had found the gold far from its hiding-place, but had brought it as far as they could and then buried it.

He further reported that they had hidden it in some break or crevice in a cliff.

Cliffs were found, crevices innumerable, but none with a fortune in gold in them.

The trail had been lost in the rock soil of a canyon, and the scouts were unable to find it again.

The sun went down and the scouts camped near where they believed was the hiding-place of the gold, and Beelzebub was questioned over and over again that night around the camp-fire to tell all that he had heard the outlaws say.

The next day with renewed hope the search was kept up.

Noon came, but the treasure had not been found.

Night fell, but the gold was still resting securely in its hiding-place.

"Boys, we must take the trail to-morrow to the Lost Valley," said the chief.

There was not a murmur of dissent.

But each scout photographed the surroundings of the suspected spot in his mind, for another try for the gold some day well in the future.

Beelzebub had been kept quiet, so he was in good condition again, and needed to be, for Buffalo Bill had told them that when they got to a certain point on the Wind River they would give up their horses, and continue on foot.

So the start was made, the chief in the lead, with the negro riding by his side, and keeping his eyes open to discover some scene he might remember to have passed in his wanderings from the Lost Valley.

At night the scouts camped in the Wind River Mountains, and here Buffalo Bill decided that it would be best to allow the two scouts to return with the horses to the rock fort, and even then they would have a long ride of it.

The packs were made then which each man was to carry, and Beelzebub insisted upon carrying the chief's as well as

his own, but this Buffalo Bill would not allow him to do.

Farewells were said the next morning, and with sad hearts the two scouts who were to take the horses back turned their faces southward.

Buffalo Bill and the others watched them go, and, casting his eyes over his men, the chief said:

"With you, Beelzebub, there are nine of us; we are afoot, and bound into the midst of an Indian country."

"Jist black up like niggers, Massa Bill, and de Injins hain't gwine ter hurt yer, sah; why, dey git when dey sees yer, sah."

Buffalo Bill smiled, and, looking over his group of daring men, said:

"Pards, we are now started upon a most mysterious and perilous trail."

"We are nine, all good men and true, as I happen to know."

"We could not be better armed, we have ample ammunition, plenty of provisions, and our rifles will get us game, our hooks and lines supply us with fish."

"I brought along the india-rubber boat one of the officers at the fort gave me, and it will carry across the streams our weapons and packs, for each one of us can swim."

"We are all good walkers, and have an extra supply of rawhide moccasins, and our boots."

"Beelzebub here has sought me to risk my life in a rescue I can learn from himself little about; but I have pledged my word to go with him, and I pledged you also to accompany me."

The men gave a cheer.

"Unfortunately, Beelzebub is lost—that is, he does not know how to find his way to the point he started from, and we are, therefore, to find it for him."

"He wished us to go on foot, hence we are now dismounted; but, unlike some tribes of Indians, I do not believe that we lose our pluck with our horses."

"It is certainly safer to go through this country on foot; we can go where horses cannot, saving time and distance, and we have nothing to hamper us, no cattle to guard by night—only ourselves to look after."

"Another thing that Beelzebub wishes us to do is to black our faces."

The scouts all laughed.

"Whether he is right or wrong in it, he says that the Indians up in this country will not harm a negro."

"He saw a number of Indians on his long, lone trail, and they ran from him, and this particular tribe, he tells me, believe that black men are evil spirits, looking for bad Indians on earth, and they will neither fire on them or go near them."

"The experiment is at least worth trying, chief."

"It is, Arizona Charlie, and we will try it, for it can do no other harm than to our complexions," was the chief's rejoinder, and the scouts all seemed greatly amused at the new role they were to appear in.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SCOUTS OF SILENCE.

While Buffalo Bill was speaking, the scouts all cast searching glances upon Beelzebub.

All knew that the black giant was a mystery, that their chief even did not know anything about him.

They were well aware that the negro had told nothing, and would not tell anything regarding the people he had come, as he claimed, to get the chief to rescue from an unknown danger, and where no one knew.

That Buffalo Bill and his scouts had many foes among the lawless men of the border they well knew.

That many had sought to get rid of their chief, to more readily carry on their lawless deeds, all the scouts knew.

The gold boomers longed for his death that they might break into the country where gold was plentiful, and it might be that, after all, the giant negro was

but a decoy to get Buffalo Bill into the power of his enemies.

All these things the band of scouts had thought of and talked over.

They liked the negro, wanted to believe him square, yet they feared him.

Still, their chief had said go, and they were with him without hesitation, no matter where their trail might lead them, if to death.

But they narrowly watched the negro while their chief was talking.

They wished to read there all that they could.

But in vain their attempt, for they might as well have looked at a statue of black marble.

"Now, pards," continued Buffalo Bill, "we none of us have weights to carry beyond our strength, and we will make easy marches until we get hardened to walking."

"We have before us a very long tramp, beyond a doubt, and a hard one, but we will get there all the same."

"We are going into an unknown country, save that a few gold boomers have gone there before us, and you know the fate of those, while Beelzebub's party are now seeking our aid to get out of a land that is most deadly to pale-faces."

"You remember that California Joe and I went up into the Big Horn country in search of a party of gold hunters."

"We found their bones, but their gold remains as securely hidden as does that of the outlaws we tracked to their doom."

"Who we are to save, what we are to find, how we are to get out, we can only guess at; but we have started upon the trail, and must see the end of it."

"To fully guard ourselves against redskins, for we soon must find many of them, we will do as Beelzebub urges—that is, black our faces and hands to appear as negroes."

"We are to go there in silence, to appear as much like black specters as possible, and the very first Indian we meet we will see what the effect is."

"May it be such as Beelzebub asserts, it will, is my prayer."

"Amen!"

The scouts uttered it fervently in chorus.

"Remember, if we run upon any Indians we must utter no cry, no word, be as silent as spectres, and put our black pard's plan to the test."

"If it don't work as he says, then we will decide very quickly what to do."

"Now, pards, we'll get to work and metamorphose ourselves, for I have corks to burn for the ebony hue, and there are enough to black a regiment, for I did not wish to get out of our war-paint, as Arizona Charlie calls it."

"I got the corks from the officers' mess hall, and there were plenty left."

The scouts laughed at the chief's hit at the officers' drinking qualities, and then each one took the corks given him, burnt them in the camp-fire, and begun to put on their "black war-paint."

They laughed heartily at each other when all were as sable as young pickaninnies, but Beelzebub did not see the joke; it was too real to him, his natural color.

But Beelzebub said:

"You'll skeer de Injins now, gemmans, I knows yer will."

"Dere was plenty of 'em run from me, and I guesses you'll done chase de whole tribe off."

"Yer see, dere Injins up here in de Big Horn country don't leab it no time, and dey don't see no colored soldiers, like de redskins funder south does."

"Den dey don't go up in de big valley, nuther, for dey is skeered ter go dere, and dat's why dem people in de Lost Valley hain't kilt, don't yer see?"

The scouts didn't "see," for Beelzebub's explanations about the people in the Lost Valley were obscure indeed.

As soon as the scouts were all ready for the march, packs were slung on their backs, and Buffalo Bill took the lead, with Beelzebub next to him, and Arizona Charlie bringing up the rear.

The Wind River was reached at noon, and, unrolling the rubber boat, which was some eight feet long by three in width, a light frame of sticks was made for it, the things put in, and, throwing off their clothes the scouts plunged in and swam to the other bank.

The boat was easily towed after them, and as they all reached the other bank Beelzebub said with a broad grin:

"I guesses dere better not be no Injins around when yer has ter swim across a stream, or dey know fer sure yer was not nigger sperrits."

The scouts lost no time in putting on their clothes at this hint, for fear Indians might be around.

Then they went into camp on the river to continue their tramp on the morrow, for they had made a fair march of it for the first day on foot.

CHAPTER XLV.

DISCOVERED.

"Pards, we go into ambush here."

The scouts were surprised at the words of their chief.

Had he any suspicion of danger they knew not of?

They simply answered in the affirmative, and then took their positions to see they knew not what.

The spot where Buffalo Bill had halted was a low ridge over which ran a well-marked game trail.

This trail the scouts had been following since leaving the Wind River, and it led up the ridge, over it, and to an open valley beyond.

By taking position upon the ridge they could readily command the trail as it came up the hill.

"I have an idea that we are being tracked, pards, and by delaying half a day here we can find out.

"It will be better to lose the time than be crept upon in our camp some night.

"We get a good chance here to see some miles behind us, and can hold this ridge against a large force if we are attacked.

"Let us wait and see."

The chief's mere suspicion was as much as most men's conviction, and the scouts were glad to halt and see what came of it.

The afternoon was about half gone when Arizona Charlie, who was on watch, said quietly:

"They are coming, chief."

"Indians?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many?"

"About three to one, if there are not more following than I see."

"Mounted?"

"Yes, sir."

"We'll be ready for them."

"Massa Bill," and Beelzebub came to where the chief was seated among the boulders and pines on the summit of the ridge.

"Yes, Beelzebub."

"You kin shoot dem Injuns any time, sah."

"Well?"

"Jist try 'em first without shooting 'em, sah."

"How do you mean?"

"When dey comes up de hill, sah, you jist march down toward 'em with the gemmens, sah, and see if dey don't run like jack-rabbits."

"I'll go you, Beelzebub; for, if they don't run at sight of us, we can encourage them to do so with our rifles."

"Yes, sah; so you kin."

"But dey'll run when dey see you all and thinks you is black sperits after 'em, and dat band hain't goin' ter foller you no more."

"I trust not."

"But we'll try them for your sake, Beelzebub."

"Yes, sah; and all git in line and move down de trail toward 'em."

"And you think they'll push the breeze back toward Wind River?"

"Yes, sah."

Buffalo Bill called him about him

and told them of the plan of the black giant to stampede the coming Indians, and they all laughed at the idea, but were most willing to try it.

The redskins were now in plain view, about a mile distant, and coming along in Indian file.

They were counted and found to be thirty-seven in number; but, though four to one against the scouts, not a man felt the slightest trepidation.

Beelzebub particularly seemed pleased at their coming, and the expression on his face caused several of the scouts to once more feel a suspicion of him, a dread that he might prove treacherous.

But the chief had faith in him, and the men would follow his lead even if they knew he was wrong.

When the Indians came to the foot of the ridge they halted and grouped together, talking excitedly there for a moment.

They had seen the trail of the scouts' boots, for they had not yet taken to their rawhide and buckskin moccasins, and had pushed rapidly along it, for they evidently expected to come upon a party of pale-faces whom they could make short work of.

"You were right, chief, in your suspicion that we were being trailed," said Pony Bob.

"I felt that way; but they are coming on now, and we'll have a chance to see how Beelzebub's plan will work.

"Be ready for the word, and, remember, no rifles are to be seen, and not a word is to be spoken."

The men bowed in acquiescence, and all eyes were prying through the pines at the redskins as their tired horses came slowly up the hill.

They came in a bunch now, and were talking earnestly.

That they had no dread of a foe in their path their manner plainly revealed, but that they hoped to catch up with those whose trail they followed, the pale-faces who had dared invade their country, was certain, for the hope made them almost hilarious, strangely so for redskins.

"Now, pards, when they reach yonder large balsam we'll show ourselves.

"They may fire upon us, but we must risk that.

"All ready!"

The Indians were now not over a hundred yards away, and suddenly, in a line, the Scouts of Silence moved out of the pines and appeared before the mounted braves.

CHAPTER XLVI.

BEELZEBUB IN THE LEAD.

There was certainly something weird and startling in the sight of Buffalo Bill and his eight companions moving out of the shadow of the pines on the ridge.

They appeared in silence, and like specters.

They showed no rifles, their manner was not hostile, but in perfect silence they advanced in a line stretching out fifty feet in length, and walked deliberately toward the Indians.

The latter were within less than a hundred yards of them before they made the discovery of what barred their path.

So silently had they glided out of the pines that the Indians only discovered them by glancing up to the top of the ridge.

Then there came a wild howl of half warning, half terror, and the one who uttered it wheeled his pony as the dismal yell broke from his lips.

Other eyes then saw what the first Indian had discovered, and the air was filled with the most fearful cries.

There were loud words of warning, chattering, wheeling of ponies, blows that fell heavily upon the animals they rode, shouts and away went the band like a pack of hounds in full cry down the steep hill at the risk of breaking the necks of horses and riders.

Here a pony fell and hurled his rider far over his head.

The pony did not rise, but the brave kept along on hands and knees, bruised and bleeding, until he could spring to his feet and go limping on down the hill.

Another pony went down and rolled over his rider, and though the pony got up, the redskin lay still until two of his comrades wheeled and, dismounting, dragged him off.

The silent and blackened-faced scouts moved slowly on in line down the hill.

Not a word was uttered by them, and not a rifle or arrow was fired at them by the Indians.

Skurrying like deer to the nearest shelter, the redskins sped on, and the scouts kept up their march to the plain.

Then they wheeled into single file and, retracing their way up the ridge, descended to the valley beyond, where a good camping-place was found.

As they came to a halt Buffalo Bill cried:

"Beelzebub, you are a dandy, a prophet, for your plan worked beyond all expectations."

The scouts also joined in the praise of the negro, who seemed highly delighted that his plan had been put to the test and proven such a success.

"Yes, gemmans, I tells yer it goes wid dem Injuns to play nigger.

"Dey hain't seen no niggers, and you'll find dat we stampedes de outfit of redskins, beggin' yer pardons fer callin' yer niggers."

"We might be far worse, and still possess white skins, Beelzebub," was Buffalo Bill's reply, and he was evidently much pleased at the terror they caused the Indians as supposed black spirits of evil sent from the shadow land after bad redskins.

They slept more serenely that night than they had yet done and were on the march when the sun rose, Buffalo Bill still leading the way and pushing in a direction that must bring him, he felt assured, to the Big Horn River.

Once he struck that stream he could direct his course with a full knowledge of what he was doing, and from what Beelzebub had told him of his trail from the Lost Valley he expected to find it somewhere not far from the river, either one side or the other.

Further talks with the giant negro upon the subject of the scout's expedition failed to glean anything more from him than he had already made known regarding the people to be rescued or where they were.

He still stuck to it that he was lost, and could not find his way back, but yet asserted that Buffalo Bill would find the Lost Valley.

After their having met the mounted band of braves at the ridge and vanquished them without a shot or a word, the scouts felt decidedly more confidence in themselves in that land of danger and which had proven so deadly to all of their race.

They marched along with lighter step, and when the halt was made at noon the nature of the country was becoming such that Buffalo Bill ordered boots off and to be replaced by rawhide moccasins.

The mountain could be more readily climbed with the lighter and more yielding footgear, and then the latter would leave no trails to speak of.

"I think we can get over this range in front of us by nightfall, and I feel pretty sure the Big Horn River is beyond," said the chief as they once more resumed their way.

Beelzebub had now become himself again, and went up the mountain at a pace that even the roughened sinews of the scouts would not stand, and he got well ahead of them in the long, hard climb.

But suddenly Buffalo Bill, who was nearest to him and a few hundred yards behind, saw him stop and throw himself upon the ground.

"Beelzebub has made a discovery," he called back to Arizona Charlie, and

the word was passed back along the line, the scouts being well strung out.

As Buffalo Bill came near to where the negro lay full length upon the ground he saw that he had reached the summit of the range and was gazing over the apex at something he had discovered on the other side.

Creeping up to the side of the negro, Buffalo Bill peered over cautiously, and he, too, "lay low," and motioned to the coming scouts to come quietly and see the discovery the black had made.

CHAPTER XLVII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLAN.

"Massa Bill, jist look a-yonder, sah, and see what I has found," said the negro as the Chief of Scouts dropped at full length by his side and peered over the range.

"You can have them, Beelzebub, for I don't want them," answered Buffalo Bill as he looked at what the negro had found.

The range was a lofty one, steep and rugged, but far down in the valley beyond was the Big Horn River.

The Chief of Scouts had been right in his belief that they would find it beyond the range.

There it was seen winding its way along the valley, its waters shadowed here and there by grand and lofty mountains, and a scene of beauty visible to the eye upon all sides.

But it was not the discovery of the Big Horn River that riveted the eyes of Buffalo Bill, nor the grand scenery, fond always as he was of the sublimity and beauties of nature.

It was another sight more important than the river, more striking at that time than the scenery.

It was an Indian village.

There it was in the valley, a hundred tepees at least, and with a large herd of ponies feeding near.

It did not look like a permanent village, and the experienced eyes of Buffalo Bill now told him that it was not.

It was an Indian village upon the march, and apparently halting there in the valley for rest and game for a few days.

One by one the scouts came up and dropped down at full length by the side of their chief and the negro to peer over the range.

They had expected some important discovery, but they saw more than they cared to.

Not a word was spoken other than a low ejaculation of surprise or a whistle at the startling discovery.

A village of a hundred tepees.

It might mean nearly a thousand redskins.

It would mean several hundred bucks.

And the scouts were but nine in number.

The sight was disheartening.

But they had come to follow the lead of Buffalo Bill.

What would he do?

Every eye was upon him, every ear waiting to catch his words.

But he had taken his field glass from its case and was already surveying the river, the valley, the Indian village through it.

What he was thinking his face did not reveal.

To the ears of the scouts came the sounds of voices.

Children were playing, squaws were scolding, dogs were barking.

All the sounds of an Indian encampment filled the air.

Then there was the neighing of Indian ponies.

This turned the gaze of Buffalo Bill upon the herd of horses.

They were beyond the village half a mile.

They were below the village upon the river.

That was the way the scouts were going.

one, of daring, and he drew back over the ridge.

The scouts followed his example.

"Pards, it looks bad, but it is not so bad as it looks."

The men knew that Buffalo Bill saw a chance for them.

"Hain't yer goin' ter skeer 'em, Massa Buf'ler Bill?" asked the negro.

"You mean by playing black ghosts, Beelzebub?"

"Yes, sah."

"There's safety in numbers, and I don't think they would scare so much as we would wish them to."

"Jist try it, sah."

"We will try it when a plan I have falls, when we have to do so, Beelzebub."

"Yes, sah."

"Night is not very far off, none of the Indians will be coming up here at this hour, and we can follow down the range until we get opposite to where their ponies are."

"From there we can see where the guards are and how many, if indeed they have any, watching the ponies."

"Then as soon as it is dark we can go down into the valley, mount some of the best ponies and stampede the whole herd."

The scouts all gave a chuckle of delight.

"We can dash away with them, and keep a-pushing them along through the night, thus getting a big lift of fifty miles."

"Of course, as you know, some of the braves will have ponies near their tepees and will follow, but they won't see us, and if there are many of them we can push on ahead of the herd and leave our horses if the pace becomes too hot."

"In this way we can get by these redskins without being seen, and get a good ride on our way."

"The Indians will not know what stampeded their ponies, and we will leave them to find out the best way they can."

This plan of Buffalo Bill met with the approval of each man, though Beelzebub seemed to regret not being able to get a chance to "skeer dem red Injins silly," as he expressed it.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE NIGHT STAMPEDE.

Down the range, out of sight of the Indian camp, went the scouts, until Buffalo Bill halted at a spot just above where the herd of ponies were feeding.

Finding a hiding place, the chief swept the valley with his glass and soon discovered that there were only a couple of youths in charge of the herd, and they were seated upon their ponies in the shadow of the trees along the river bank.

"There are boys in charge, pards, but soon after night braves will come to relieve them, we may be sure, so we will be ready to move the moment the shadows deepen in the valley."

"Three of you go to the further end of the herd and mount, and we will go to the end near the village, so when you start they'll follow under our driving."

"You take the lead, Arizona Charlie, and keep the ponies going at full speed when they get started."

The men understood the plan, and in half an hour it was dark.

Of course supper was not to be thought of then, and while Arizona Charlie led the way to the lower end of the herd, Buffalo Bill and those with him rounded up the ponies feeding nearest to the Indian village.

Good ponies were caught without trouble, the scouts mounted, and with their lariats for bridles began to urge the herd forward.

The men lay low on the backs of the ponies, so as not to be seen, and as Arizona Charlie and those with him dashed off on the leaders the other scouts pushing the herd upon them, the two startled Indian boys could just get out of the

way as the stampeded animals went flying down the valley.

What stampeded them those two boys could not tell, but their shrill cries gave the alarm, as well as did the thunder of hundreds of hoofs.

There were braves in the village who had ponies near their tepees, and as soon as they could they dashed off in pursuit.

But the stampeded ponies had over a mile the start before the warriors could get away in pursuit, and that meant a long, hard chase unless the ponies stopped of their own free will.

There were not over a score of braves who had ponies to join in the pursuit, and as they came upon the two boys the latter had a strange story to tell of the whole herd raising their heads as one animal, uttering a wild snort and going off as though they were possessed of evil spirits.

On down the valley swept the herd, and as mile after mile was gone over the slow ponies and used up ones began to lag behind.

But Arizona Charlie and his men led the way, and Buffalo Bill and those with him kept the pace a hot one, forcing the ponies that could run and endure the strain close on the heels of the leaders.

Behind them they knew the warriors were coming with all the speed they could to try and head off the herd.

But a stern chase is a long one always, especially when the leaders have a start of over a mile, and several hours thus passed before at last the shadowy outlines of the pursuers could be seen.

"We must push to the lead now, pards, at all hazards."

"We have to desert our ponies, and, fortunately, we have the timber along the river to hide us," said Buffalo Bill.

The ponies they rode then were pushed the harder, and they began to pass animal after animal.

The centre of the herd was reached, then they forged nearer and nearer to the front, the ponies they passed halting as they went by them, and thus checking the more rapid pursuit of the braves in chase.

At last Buffalo Bill saw Arizona Charlie's tall form ahead, and the next moment the scouts were all bunched together.

"Off to the right here."

"All lay low on your ponies, and no one speak aloud, for there are a score of braves pursuing," said Buffalo Bill.

The word was passed in a low tone from one to the other, the scouts wheeled their ponies to the right, the shadow of the timber along the river was reached, and each man slipped from the back of the animal he rode, pulled off the lariat bridle from his pony and bounded into the shelter of the trees.

Lashed with the lariats to urge them on, the group of ponies just deserted, though lagged out, ran on down the valley, and suddenly in chase swept half a dozen braves.

"They had gained well on us, but they'll soon head those ponies off and return up the valley," said Buffalo Bill.

"It was a successful stampede," Arizona Charlie remarked.

"Yes, and saved us a tramp of twenty miles."

"Now to push along on foot for a few miles, as soon as those braves go back."

This the braves were not long in doing, going back at a canter and driving the ponies so recently deserted by riders before them, yet with no thought of the reason of the wild stampede.

"How I'd like ter skeer 'em," muttered Beelzebub.

CHAPTER XLIX.

BEELZEBUB CREATES A SENSATION.

As soon as the braves had found where they were hiding Buffalo Bill led the way on down the valley, taking the open trail running along near the river, instead of keeping in the shadow of the timber.

After going a couple of miles they

came to a small stream running down from the mountains, and this the chief followed up until it was seen to come out of a canyon.

Here was a good camping-place, a fire was built in a crevice of the rocks, supper was gotten, and the scouts turned in for the night, well tired out after their hard day's work.

Up with the light they were determined to press on for several miles before having breakfast, and fortunate for them it was, as they had not gone half a mile and were just nearing the mouth of the canyon they had camped in, when Buffalo Bill, who was well in the advance, was seen to come to a sudden stop.

The scouts halted also.

They saw their chief step cautiously back into a thicket, then move to the right and there stand gazing at what had attracted his attention and halted him so suddenly.

After a moment he motioned to them to approach.

They did so, and gaining a point of observation beheld, not a quarter of a mile distant, a band of half a hundred Indians just going into camp.

They had picketed their ponies, and were gathering wood with the evident intention of having breakfast there.

"Those fellows are on a rapid march, and evidently belong to the village up the river, and are going home."

"I judge they have come from across the Big Horn, and have struck the trail of their village and now have halted for rest and food."

"Pards, we cannot get out of this canyon until they have passed on, for we can't scale those cliffs, not being birds, and you know this stream tumbles over a precipice at the head of this trap into which we meandered last night."

"Arizona Charlie, you remain here with me, and we'll see what we can discover more about that band, while the rest of you return up the canyon and take it easy."

Buffalo Bill and Arizona Charlie then remained in hiding, watching the redskins, while the remainder of the band returned up the canyon, which at its entrance was a quarter of a mile in width, but narrowed to a few feet at its end, and there the creek tumbled over a cliff into a waterfall.

The Indians, the scouts saw, were some three-score in number, and their ponies stood with heads lowered as though they had been very hard ridden.

Several fires had been built, and the smell of broiling venison floated up the canyon, while the redskins could be seen gathered about the fire eating heartily.

There was a thicket near that hid half of their camping-place, but Buffalo Bill quickly ran his field glass over the band and at last said:

"Charlie, those redskins have been up to some deviltry, I am certain."

"They have no plunder or scalps, but they have not been on a hunt, or they would have their game with them."

"Then, too, there is so much game in this country they would not have to go after it."

"They've been on a war trail near some of the forts, sir, and look as though they had been worsted in a fight."

"Yes, that is about it."

"Doubtless they have been in the neighborhood of Fetterman, as they came up the right bank of the Big Horn—by the way, Charlie, may they not be the party we tackled down on the Nebraska, where my good pard Doc Miner, the gold boomer captain, was captured?"

"That is the very band, sir."

"Your glass don't reveal him anywhere?"

"No, so I fear he may have lost his life, as they reported, in attempting to escape from them."

"Still, I find it hard to believe that he did."

"I also had a belief that he was not dead."

"But that is the band, as you said, and they are hastening to regain their village," having come one way, while we came the other.

"Do you observe any wounded among them?"

"Yes, now I am looking for wounded. I see a number who appear to have been used rather severely by some one—yes, in the fight with the gold boomers and then ourselves."

"I see that they appear in no hurry now, having crossed the Big Horn and struck the trail of their village; but their arrival there will cause wailing instead of rejoicing—holy smoke! look there!"

Buffalo Bill pointed toward the other side of the canyon, where, quietly walking out upon the plain, was no less a personage than the giant negro.

He had come out of the canyon and was walking deliberately down toward the Indian camp, the latter not yet having discovered him.

CHAPTER L.

THE BLACK SPIRIT OF THE BIG HORN.

"Blast that ducky!"

"He will ruin us," cried Arizona Charlie, as he looked toward the spot where Buffalo Bill had pointed and discovered Beelzebub as serene as a May morn going deliberately toward the Indian camp.

"He will be killed if we don't save him."

"You run, Charlie, and call the boys," cried Buffalo Bill.

Arizona Charlie was about to obey, when Pony Bob came running up, and not far behind him were the other scouts.

"Do you see that nigger, chief?"

"Yes."

"He's mad or a traitor."

"Why, he was there with us up the canyon and said he could scare the reds to death."

"Then he got up and walked away, and soon after we discovered that he had gone toward the other side of the canyon."

"We followed, and you see what he has done."

"Yes, perhaps has gotten us into a hole from which there is no escape."

"Stand ready, men, to see what the outcome will be."

The men were all ready, in line, their packs on their backs, and ready for a fight or a footrace, as it might turn out for them.

Every eye was upon the negro, who was now too far off to recall.

He was walking calmly along, straight toward the Indian camp, and they, strange to say, had not yet discovered him.

They were still broiling venison stuck on the end of sticks and eating it in a way that showed their hunger by no means satiated.

Feeling secure where they were, confident that they would not be pursued that far into their country, and knowing that their village could not be over half a day's journey ahead of them, they were taking matters coolly, to recover from the strain they had evidently been on for some time.

Still on the giant negro walked, while the scouts could only stand ready for action, watch him and wait for the finale.

Beelzebub appeared not in the least disturbed as he moved toward the Indian camp.

But suddenly there was heard a wild, almost unearthly, cry.

It was of terror and ferocity commingled, and it was echoed by half a hundred throats, while it brought every brave to his feet.

There was one glance of wild eyes toward the negro, gigantic in form, black as ink and gliding, rather than seeming to walk, toward them, and with yells of fright they sprang for their ponies with an alacrity and manner that said most plainly:

"The devil take the hindmost!"

There was not a moment of hesitation, and their cries told the story of their stampede and terror, for loud was heard in their own tongue:

"The black spirit! The evil spirit of the Big Horn!"

Leaping upon their ponies, here and there two braves upon the back of one horse, leaving their camp outfits, saddles and all, they started off as fast as they could mount.

They could be seen lashing their ponies furiously, and looking back in terror, and were all soon spread out as they sped up the valley.

Then Beelzebub was seen by the amazed and watching scouts to start in a run after them.

This added to their flight and terror, and the blows falling upon the worn-out ponies could be distinctly heard by the wondering scouts, who in silence awaited the outcome.

"See there!"

"One of the horses of the gold boomers!" cried Buffalo Bill, as a large animal came out of the thicket at the camp and appeared in view.

The scouts could hardly restrain from a cheer, but Buffalo Bill said:

"Remember, boys, we are scouts of silence on this trail."

"But that horse tells the story beyond all doubt, that those are the Indians who had the gold boomers corralled and whom we drove off."

"But look at the giant black!"

Not an Indian was now visible, the last one having turned a bend in the valley that shut them out of sight.

The negro, however, still kept on after them.

Then he, too, turned the bend and disappeared.

Still Buffalo Bill gave no order to move.

He would not leave the canyon until he felt that it was proper to do so.

For some time they waited, but Beelzebub did not reappear.

What could it mean no one knew.

The Indian camp remained as they had left it.

If there was a badly wounded redskin there he was not visible.

The fires still burned, the horse of the gold boomers and several Indian ponies were grazing near, but no human being could be seen.

At last an exclamation came from several of the scouts together.

The negro was returning down the valley, but yet a mile away.

CHAPTER LI.

THE PALE-FACE PRISONER.

"Well, pards, Beelzebub has not deserted us, as some of you feared he had," said Buffalo Bill as the negro was seen returning at a rapid walk down the valley.

"No indeed, chief."

"And he kept his word about scaring the redskins silly, although he took big chances to do so."

"He scared them frightfully."

"I didn't think an Indian could get that badly scared."

"Didn't they light out lively?"

"They pushed the breeze beautifully up the valley."

"What on earth caused the stampede?"

"The nigger."

Such were the expressions of the scouts regarding what had really been a most complete stampede of Indians.

Beelzebub had indeed kept his word, for the redskins had certainly been terribly frightened.

As he came on down the valley the scouts wished to go out to meet him, to greet him with a cheer.

But this Buffalo Bill would not allow.

"We do not yet know who may have been left in the camp, pards."

"Just wait and see, for when Beelzebub wants us he knows where to find us," said the chief.

Upon second thought this was considered the wisest plan, and they kept in their place of concealment and waited.

Down the valley in silence walked the large black, and at last reached the camp.

He disappeared behind the little thicket of pines, then reappeared, and, walking near to a grazing pony, slung his lariat.

The animal was cleanly caught and led back to the thicket.

Then some minutes passed away and once more the negro reappeared.

He was leading the pony, and upon the animal, supported by several saddles and blankets and tied there with lariats, was an Indian brave.

That he was badly wounded the scouts could see at that distance.

The head of the pony was checked up, so that he could not feed, and then he was led to the trail and started up the valley on the trail of the Indian village and the braves who had stampeded.

Until the pony disappeared from sight around the bend the giant negro stood watching him.

Then he turned back to the deserted camp and disappeared in the thicket.

Still Buffalo Bill did not allow the scouts to show themselves.

After another long wait the negro reappeared, and, looking toward the canyon, he beckoned several times.

"Now, pards, we'll go."

With this Buffalo Bill led the way, and they walked rapidly toward the Indian camp, Beelzebub having returned to the thicket.

When Buffalo Bill and his men reached the camp they beheld a strange scene.

The redskins had deserted everything, and the gold boomer's horse and several ponies besides.

But that was not all, for they had left the badly wounded Indian Beelzebub had sent off and two dead comrades, the latter having evidently just died of their wounds.

And they had left still more, for lying in the pine thicket was a prisoner.

It was a white man.

He was securely bound, painfully so, and Beelzebub was kneeling by his side unfastening the thongs that were about his hands and feet, and which were much swollen and inflamed.

But a glad cry broke from the lips of Buffalo Bill as he advanced toward the prisoner.

It was Doc Miner, the gold boomer captain.

"Ah, Miner, I am glad indeed to see you, and I have found it hard to believe you dead," said the chief.

"Only half dead, Mr. Cody; but you have saved me."

"And glad we are, for we deeply deplored not having been able to do so before."

"All the rest were killed—I am the last of my band of boomers."

"Yes, and the man I would have risked much to save, for I have not forgotten what I owe you."

"Pards, this is the man who proved my friend, the gold boomer captain, Doc Miner, as I have told you."

The men pressed about him and grasped his swollen hands, which Beelzebub had released.

Turning to the negro, Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, Beelzebub, you have kept your word and frightened the redskins into fits, so I know now surely that there is virtue in what you have asserted about black spirits being a terror to the Indians of this Big Horn country."

"Yes, sah, dey runs like de debble when dey sees a nigger."

"I done tell dis gemman here you was all blacked up like niggers, as I was 'feerd he'd be scared, too."

"But, Massa Bill, we must git out of here right quick, for dem Injins will come back after dere prisoner in a short time."

This was decided upon at once, and preparations to start were began.

CHAPTER LII.

AN ADVANCE UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

"Massa Bu'ler Bill."

"Yes, Beelzebub."

"Can I say suthin', sah?"

"All that you wish."

"You see dem travois, sah, which de Injins hab tied to dere ponies to carry de wounded on?"

"Yes."

"We wants jist four of 'em, sah."

"What for?"

"Dis gemman can't walk."

"He can ride his horse, the large one."

"No, sah."

"Why not?"

"We don't want ter leave no trail."

"True."

"Want ter leab de horse, de ponies and de camp outfit all here, exceptin' the gemman and de gold."

"What gold?"

"His gold, sah, and dere is heaps of it, for de Injins fetch it along, sah," and the negro pointed to the bags of gold which the gold boomers had brought with them, only to lose their lives in defending, save Doc Miner.

"We can hide that away somewhere, Beelzebub."

"Not now, sah, but when we habs more time."

"Yer see, sah, we must not disturb de camp' ceptin' de gemman and de gold, and as I hab sent off dat wounded injin he'll tell 'em about me."

"I didn't open my mouth to him, was still as death, but jist took him up, put him on pony and tied him on all right."

"Then I started him off."

"He thinks I am de black evil speeret of de Big Horn, and when dey come back dey'll find I has let de prisoner go, and what I hab done wid de gold dey won't care."

"Now, sah, wid dem travois," and he pointed again to the long poles:

"We can carry de gemman and de gold."

"De scouts kin carry all on dere shoulders, sah, slung atween 'em an' de poles, and we kin git over ground right peert."

"Beelzebub, you have got a very level head."

"It is jist what we will do."

"Come, boys, we must carry Doc Miner and the gold, too," and Buffalo Bill explained just what Beelzebub had suggested.

Four poles were selected, a blanket was swung between two, and upon these, in a swing, Doc Miner, who could walk only with great pain, was placed, and the gold bags upon the other.

"I'll divide the gold, pards, for carrying me as you do," said Doc Miner.

"If you can find a man in my band who would touch a dollar's worth of it for a service to you I wouldn't have him with me five minutes after I knew it," said Buffalo Bill somewhat hotly, and the men joined heartily in their chief's opinion.

A quarter of an hour after their arrival in camp the scouts shouldered their two loads and started off, with Buffalo Bill in the lead.

Arizona Charlie and Beelzebub being the tallest had the rear ends of the litter bearing Doc Miner, the latter seeming to deeply feel his helplessness.

The Indian camp was left just as it was found, with the exception of the gold and the rescued prisoner.

The gold boomer's horse and the ponies were left grazing near the dead redskins, where they had been placed by their comrades, and there was nothing to reveal that other than the supposed "evil spirit," a black ghost, had been there.

The superstitious dread of the Indians all knew would allow them to believe that the evil spirit had been angry with them for taking the pale-face and his ghost, so had taken both from them, yet had sent their wounded comrade on his way, and left all else as he had found it.

Leaving no trail with their rawhide shoes, the scouts turned their steps to-

ward the base of the mountains and went along the range.

Mile after mile they held on, seeming to be tireless, for they showed little distress over the weights they were carrying.

At last a stream was come to, flowing out of a canyon, a march of fully a dozen miles had been made, and in a secure spot Buffalo Bill encamped his men.

Then the swollen limbs of the rescued prisoner were bathed, arnica put on them, and a good meal cooked for all to enjoy, for Buffalo Bill saw that a bend in the range would completely hide the smoke from the Indians up the valley.

It was a good place, too, where the gold could be hidden, for Doc Miner proudly said there was not a man in the party whom he would not trust with the secret.

If the people of the Lost Valley were found, the retreat would be up the Big Horn to that point at least, whether they were making for Fort Aspen or Fort Fetterman,* and the gold could be taken up and carried along or a special expedition made for it.

To carry it along then would but be to tire the scouts down, as Doc Miner would not be able to walk for days, and of course he could not be left behind.

By leaving the gold the men could relieve each other in carrying the gold boomer captain.

So the gold, in bright, glittering particles, from the size of a pin-head to an acorn, and nuggets as large as a hen's egg, were packed more closely and hidden in a crevice in the cliff overhanging the canyon.

The march was not resumed that day, for Buffalo Bill wished to see whether the Indians did follow, and if so, that was a splendid place for a stand, if as black spirits the scouts could not frighten them off and had consequently a fight on their hands.

The next morning, as not an Indian had been seen, four of the scouts shouldered their load and the party took up the march.

Doc Miner expressed himself as feeling much better and said that he would be able to walk the next day.

But this his hearers would not listen to.

It was slow traveling naturally, but Buffalo Bill felt that he owed his life to the gold boomer captain and could not do too much for him, and the men had the same feeling toward him for what he had done for their chief.

Thus another day passed, and Doc Miner insisted upon walking a mile or two, and did so.

Another night camp and Buffalo Bill knew that they had gotten well up toward the Big Horn Mountains, and if the people of the Lost Valley really existed, save in the imagination of Beelzebub, the black giant, they could not be so very far from where the camp then was.

CHAPTER LIII.

IN THE LAND OF THE LOST VALLEY.

Still another day and another went by, and each night camp brought the scouts further and further into a most beautiful country, yet one that thus far had been most fatal to all pale-faces venturing there, lured to risk life and untold hardships and suffering in search of the yellow dross that buys men so readily, soul and body.

Doc Miner had marched half the way the day before, and said that he would not be carried any further, that he was able to walk.

In vain did the scouts assert that they could stand the strain; he would insist upon having his way.

"If you'll only cut your journey a few miles short on a day I can stand it, Chief Cody," he said.

"We'll see to-morrow," was the answer.

* Forts Thompson, Brown, Caspar and McKinney were established later in the Big Horn country.

And noon the next day brought them to a perfect garden spot in the Big Horn Mountains.

The springs were as clear as crystal and cold as ice, the trees grand and the little valleys most inviting for a camp.

Beelzebub boldly asserted that the Indians would never come there, that they believed these mountains the abode of the evil spirits.

There were springs there of boiling water, and most sulphurous fumes, sending clouds of yellow smoke high in the air, and near these boiling waters no game would come, though the grasses in the valleys were as soft as velvet and luscious as fruit.

No birds made their haunts there, and why should they—Indians—make their abode where the waters smelt like burnt powder, were scalding hot and red and yellow?*

Buffalo Bill knew in spite of his protestations and nerve, that Doc Miner was not yet able to walk.

Good food, rest, and bathing in these springs would help him; so he decided to go regularly into camp there.

They need have no dread of Indians there, and they had left no trail to be followed.

They would halt there, for the men needed the rest, and he and Beelzebub would take short searches to try and find the Lost Valley and its mysterious people.

Several times in the last day the giant negro had halted and regarded his surroundings in a fixed way.

He seemed to be trying to recall some feature in the landscape, as though he had seen it before.

It had been two months and more since he was there before, if he had passed that way in his wanderings, and then the trees were bright green, in midsummer.

Now they were changing to autumn tints, and, as is well known, this changed the whole aspect of the country.

The springs the negro had not seen, though there were people from the Lost Valley who had been there.

"Beelzebub has been near here before, I feel certain, Arizona Charlie, and our plan is to scout about the mountains until we strike some locality familiar to him."

"Yes, chief, that is just it."

"We can all have a rest, and Doc Miner will not be carried any more, and he is really not able to walk far yet."

"No; and it is not any wonder, when you think them red devils had his hands tied behind him during all their retreat, and his legs so tightly bound that the flesh was cut into."

"Yes; but he will rally quickly, and soon will be well."

"He is a brave fellow, and a noble-hearted man, if he did break the law by invading this country as a gold boomer."

"He is all you say of him, chief, and the boys are all very much attached to him."

"Then, too, he's another strong arm and brave heart, if we get into trouble, which I now believe we will not, as the darky seems to be a terror the redskin won't face."

"But will you pick the camp?"

"Yes."

The spot selected was all that could be wished.

Wicky-ups were built as a shelter, for the cold nights were coming on, and the men made themselves most comfortable right near a large spring.

Leaves furnished good mattresses to spread the blankets upon, the provisions were plentiful, and very little use had been made of the ammunition since the fight with the gold boomers, save to kill game.

As there was no game near the spring, it was decided to send several scouts on a hunt the next day to get deer, miles

away, and in the streams the fish were plentiful.

The scouts still kept their faces and hands blacked well with burnt cork; for they had realized the virtue of being black up in that country, and Doc Miner had transferred himself also, in appearance at least, to a negro.

Without a guard the scouts lay down to sleep, and nothing disturbed their slumbers.

The next morning Arizona Charlie took a party hunting up the valley with him, and Buffalo Bill and Beelzebub began their first real search for the Lost Valley.

CHAPTER LIV.

MISSING.

The hunters were gone all day, and when they returned to the camp at sunset they carried very heavy loads on their shoulders of game of various kinds.

But Doc Miner and the two scouts who remained in the camp with him could give no reply as to what had become of Buffalo Bill and the negro.

They had not put in an appearance, and it was certainly thought that they should have done so.

"Was it any one else than the chief, I would be anxious," said Arizona Charlie, hopefully; but all could see that he was anxious, even though it was the chief.

Buffalo Bill had said that they would be back before night.

He had not returned.

It had been his intention, they knew, to go out each day with the negro, and in a different direction, to try and come upon some scene Beelzebub would recognize.

If he did not do so from that camp, he would move to another, and in that time Doc Miner would be able to walk as well as any of them, and they would see what discovery could be made.

But here the very first day of the search the Chief of the Scouts and the giant negro did not return.

What did it, could it mean?

Buffalo Bill was not the man to get lost anywhere.

He could find his way in the darkness right through an unknown country.

It was a talent with him—an instinct—and his men never feared for him, save from an ambush from an enemy or treachery.

There were several of the scouts who still doubted Beelzebub.

They could not feel the faith in him which their chief did.

In spite of the seeming honesty of the negro, they doubted him.

He was an object of mystery to them—a man to dread.

Why had he not come out openly and told the Chief of Scouts all about the people of the Lost Valley, and where to find it?

They could not believe that he had started alone to find aid, to look up Buffalo Bill, and yet could not find his way back to the point from whence he had started.

It looked strange to them.

Now he had gone off alone with the Chief of Scouts, and they had not returned.

This to some looked like treachery.

The scouts awaited supper for some time, and then ate it, as the chief and the negro did not return.

The meal was, however, not enjoyed by any one.

Bedtime came; and yet what could be done?

No one could go out at night to look for the missing chief and the negro.

If nothing had happened, then Buffalo Bill would find the way to the camp in a mountain storm.

All knew that the scout did not go without his blanket, a haversack of food, and was prepared to spend the night anywhere he might be overtaken.

A search of the traps of the negro showed that he had gone also prepared for a stay, if necessary.

At last the scouts decided to retire, and Arizona Charlie put the best face on the non-return of the chief by saying that they had doubtless gone so far, made some discovery, and to carry out their intention had decided to camp where they were for the night, to be on the spot early in the morning, rather than return to camp.

"We will start on the hunt, pards, if they are not here to breakfast," said Arizona Charlie, who was next in command to Buffalo Bill.

Dawn came, but the chief and the negro had not returned.

Then Arizona Charlie was sorry that the two dogs brought with them from Fort Fetterman had not accompanied them up into the Big Horn country.

"They could have scented the trail," he said.

"Yes; and might have betrayed us a hundred times," Pony Bob returned.

"I did not think of that, for I had in mind the trailing of the chief."

"It was better to leave them at the rock fort, and yet I wish the dogs were here now," said Arizona Charlie.

One of those who appeared to be most anxious about the chief was Doc Miner.

He wanted to go on the search, but this Arizona Charlie would not hear of.

"We will all go, and divide in twos, save myself, and if we cannot find their trail we will go the way we think they must have gone."

"You take care of the camp, Doc, and each one of us, as he gives up the search, will come in; only I do not wish any man to give up until he is certain that he cannot find the chief, and must get back here by night."

"Yes, I want every man back here in camp by night."

"You all see where we are located, and no man need get lost."

"Come right back to camp if any discovery is made; and, I tell you, boys, we must find the chief."

"If he has been treacherously dealt with, as I see some of you believe, then we know who did it, and we must find the negro."

"Now, pards, let us be off."

Such was Arizona Charlie's speech to his comrades, and they all started on their search.

And in the lone camp Doc Miner remained by himself, watching them as they disappeared on different trails, and musing to himself in a very determined way:

"Buffalo Bill must be found, dead or alive; and, if dead, he shall be avenged!"

CHAPTER LV.

AN UNSEEN ENEMY.

When Buffalo Bill and Beelzebub left the camp together, the chief went down the valley leading from the Big Horn Mountains, where the camp had been located, hoping to pass some scene that the negro would recall at sight.

Could he do this, Buffalo Bill felt little doubt but that they could in that way find the Lost Valley, for the scout had perfect faith that the negro was sincere in all that he had said, and that it was not the creation of a mind diseased.

Brave as he was, good plainsman also, it could be readily understood by Buffalo Bill how the negro failed to find a given locality when he had been guided thither by some one else, and had simply left there to endeavor to find his way to a place where he could get word of him, the Chief of Scouts, who was to be secretly urged to come to the rescue of people in distress.

Why some one else—the guide of the party, for instance—had not been sent on this mission Buffalo Bill had been unable to find out from Beelzebub, who would tell nothing more than he had made up his mind could, or should be told.

Starting out alone with Beelzebub, and having arrived, as it were, almost upon the scene to which the negro had wished to bring him, Buffalo Bill thought that

*Now the famous sulphur and other medicinal springs of the Big Horn Basin, as eagerly sought by pale-faces as they were dreaded by redskins.

perhaps he would tell him more than he thus far had done, and to encourage him to do so he had said:

"Well, Beelzebub, you think we are near the scene of the Lost Valley?"

"Sure, sah; very sartin."

"What do you tell by?"

"Well, sah, dere is trees, and mountains and valleys dat looks familiar like, though I can't jist place 'em; but I is sartin I has seen 'em before."

"Did you ever go far from the valley?"

"Not very, sah; but I hunted 'round, maybe ten and a dozen miles away."

"Suppose you find some spot that you recall thoroughly, will you go right to the valley?"

"Well, Massa Bill, I'll go as near as I kin, and then let you decide what is ter be done."

"All right; keep your eyes open, and see if you can find any place you remember to have been in before."

"Yes, sah; I'm a lookin' hard, sah."

They went on together for some miles, and the valley they were following opened into a larger one.

As they came out into the larger valley, Beelzebub halted suddenly, rubbed his eyes, looked about him, and said earnestly:

"Massa Buf'ler Bill, I knows whar I is."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sah; you has found me."

"Found you?"

"Yes, sah; for, if yer finds me, then I knows whar I is."

"I don't just grasp your meaning, Beelzebub."

"I has been in dis valley before, sah."

"Ah!"

"I has kilt game here, sah."

"Then you think you recognize where you are?"

"I knows it, sah."

"You believe you can find your way from here to the Lost Valley?"

"I kin, sah."

"What do you recognize about this valley?"

"If I is right, sah, you see dem cliffs 'way yonder?"

"Yes."

"Dem is over de canyon where dey used ter git gold."

"The people of the Lost Valley?"

"Yes, sah."

"Where are they now?"

"In de Lost Valley, sah."

"Can you go there from here?"

"If dem cliffs yonder is over de gold canyon, I kin, sah."

"Shall we go to the cliffs?"

"Yes, sah."

"They are some miles from here."

"I knows dat, sah, but right along."

The negro started off down the valley in a way that told the scout that he was in earnest, that he had certainly "found himself"—or, that is, gotten his bearings from some familiar scene before him.

He kept up a rapid pace, Buffalo Bill keeping close by his side.

The cliffs loomed up nearer and nearer, and at last the scout and the negro were almost under their shadow.

"Massa Bill."

"Well, Beelzebub."

"You see dat break yonder in de cliffs?"

"Yes."

"It is a canyon, sah."

"Well."

"It runs back from where you see de open place, sah, and dere big spring yonder dat flow down de canyon, and dere whar dey found de gold."

"The gold boomers?"

"Yes, sah."

"Then they are there now?"

"No, sah; dey bein't."

"Why not?"

"Dey in de Lost Valley."

"Do you know how to get there from here?"

"Yes, sah; but you jist wait right here until I go up to de break in de cliff and take a peep in fust."

"All right; go ahead, and I'll wait here, Beelzebub."

The negro went forward alone, begun to climb up the steep rocks to the break in the cliff, and, watching him, Buffalo Bill saw him peep cautiously over, as though he expected to see an enemy beyond.

A moment he remained thus, and then came a distant report of a rifle that echoed and re-echoed among the cliffs, and Buffalo Bill saw the negro sink down upon his face as though dead.

CHAPTER LVI.

TWO OF A KIND.

Buffalo Bill was fairly startled at what he beheld.

He had not thought of danger there to himself or the negro.

The shot had come so unexpectedly that for a moment he did not know where to look for an enemy.

It appeared to have ended the life of Beelzebub, for he had fallen in a heap and lay limp and motionless like a dead man.

But the scout was not one to hesitate long when action was needed, or to allow a crime go unpunished when he could bring the perpetrator to book.

Thoughts went like lightning through his mind.

He thought of the people of Lost Valley that the negro had risked so much to rescue.

Could they have killed their rescuer? How far was the Lost Valley from where he then was?

Of course, it must be those from the valley who had fired on the black giant.

But who they were he must know, and where they were, as well as why that murderous shot had been sent at a rescuer.

Bounding forward, the scout reached a large rock at the base of the cliff.

As he did so, a man sprung in view through the break of the cliff, and within a few feet of the form of the negro.

He was a large man, heavily bearded, long-haired, and he held a rifle in his hand.

With a wave of his hand to some one unseen, he called out:

"Come, Tom; for I told you I was right."

"It's ther giant nigger of the Lost Valley."

Buffalo Bill heard a voice answer afar off, but did not catch what was said; yet he heard the reply of the man in full view of him, for he replied to the other:

"Yes, dead as ther devil."

"I chipped him atween ther eyes."

"Come along, and we'll plant him."

The scout remained behind the boulder.

He could afford to wait; for he knew that another enemy was near, and would soon be in sight.

The one in sight had fired on the negro, knowing who he was from his words, and being anxious to kill him.

He had spoken, too, of the Lost Valley; so he must know where it was.

His words told the scout that Beelzebub was dead, and in the very moment of his success in bringing him to the rescue of people who, if these two were a specimen of them, did not deserve rescue.

To "plant" the body of Beelzebub, and which the scout understood to mean to bury him, he knew that it could not be done there in the rocks. They must bring it to the valley where the earth was soft.

To do this they must come down within a few paces of the boulder behind which Buffalo Bill was hiding.

"I think I've got the best of this, and that Beelzebub will be avenged," muttered Buffalo Bill, and, slinging his rifle at his back, he drew a revolver in each hand.

"Ho, Rocks, yer got him," Buffalo Bill heard; yet he dared not look toward the speaker for fear of being seen.

"It's ther nigger, hain't it?" asked the man who had fired the shot.

"Sure."

"How'd he git out?"

"Who knows; fer I thought he'd give up trying long ago."

"He didn't, though, if he's here."

"No, he didn't; but there can't be more of 'em out."

"You bet ther hain't, and they won't be no more; so we've got it our way, sure."

"We has ef our two pards comes back all right."

"They'll git here, fer gold will fetch 'em, you bet."

"Then we'll be rich for our nat'ral lives."

"We will, and hev something ter leave after death."

"We played to win, and we got ther game; only I don't like this nigger getting out."

"Me nuther."

"More might."

"Not ef they come ther way he did; for thar hain't more men kin do it that I'm acquainted with."

"Nor me; but I wishes our two pards would git back with the horses, for it's after time some weeks, and provisions is running low."

"Yes, and gold won't buy food in this country."

"No; all we has got won't git us a meal if we was starving."

"That's so; but suppose we keep a eye on ther valley, for if we sees more of 'em gittin' out it means death ter us, if we don't fust kill them."

"It does; but we'll do ther killin', as has just been done in this case of ther nigger; but let's drag him down inter ther soft ground there, go through his pockets, and see what he's wuth to us outside of the killin', and then he kin be left for coyotes ter chaw on, fer it's too much like work ter plant him."

With this the two men took hold of the negro, and their oaths revealed to Buffalo Bill that they were dragging him along down the steep hillside, and found it no easy task.

Nearer and nearer they came, and the scout moved to the side of the rock nearest to which they must pass.

A moment more and they came within ten feet of him, and would have come full upon him, when suddenly they were confronted by a tall form and heard the words:

"Hands up, both of you!"

CHAPTER LVII.

AT THE REVOLVER'S MUZZLE.

The sudden appearance of the Chief of the Scouts of Silence before them, appearing like an apparition to the two men, who had no thought of danger near, caused them to cry out in mingled terror and utter surprise.

The form of the negro, which they were half-bearing, half-dragging along, was dropped with a suddenness that was by no means showing a proper respect for the dead.

There the two men stood, and before them towered the tall, athletic form of Buffalo Bill.

He held a revolver in each hand, and was ten feet from them.

"Hands up, I said!"

The men had not heeded the first command, perhaps from utter helplessness in their amazement to obey.

Now they did heed, and quickly.

Buffalo Bill stepped toward the one nearest him, unbuckled his belt, thus disarming him of his knife and revolvers, and then drew the strap of his rifle over his head.

"Now your turn, sir!"

The man did not move.

"Step here, quick, or I'll reach you with a bullet."

The scout saw that the men had discovered that they were two to one, and were plotting resistance.

But the hint of reaching for him with a bullet brought the man quickly to within the length of the scout's arm.

He, too, was disarmed of his belt of weapons and his rifle.

"Now I wish to tie you, and if I see

the first show of funny business, you will hand in your chips."

The men made no resistance, but they were glancing toward each other furtively, and certainly were plotting to escape.

"Lie flat on your faces, both of you, and put your hands behind your back!" came the order.

"I'll tie 'em, Massa Buf'ler Bill."

The words fairly startled the scout, with all his iron nerve.

It was as though a dead man was speaking to him.

The two men uttered a yell of fright, and for a moment seemed about to risk bullets in the face of superstitious fear.

Had it been night-time, the added dread that darkness brings to the superstitious would have sent them away on the jump.

"Why, Beelzebub, I thought that you were dead, and, thank Heaven, it is not so," said Buffalo Bill earnestly.

"No, massa; it were a close call, for dat bullet done cut clean inter my head, and I guesses will kill me yet."

"I is awful dizzy in my head like, but I kin tie dese gemmens all right."

With this the negro passed his hand across his head, took his lariat from over his shoulder, and began to tie the two men, Buffalo Bill keeping them covered with his revolver, and aiding in binding them securely.

"The one lariat will do for them both, and keep them tied together, Beelzebub—there, now we have them; but can you not stand up?"

"It don't seem as though I could, sir," and the black kept sitting on the ground.

"I'll see to your wound right off."

With this the scout placed the weapons on the ground, wheeled the prisoners face to face, and bound them thus with his own lariat.

"Now, Beelzebub," and he began to examine the wound.

It was in the centre of the forehead; but, having been fired upward, the bullet had glanced on the frontal bone, cut along under the scalp for several inches, and then made its way out, leaving the two wounds, but neither serious, though the shock of the blow had felled the black and rendered him unconscious for some minutes.

Bathing the wound with water from his canteen, and binding it up with a bandage moistened with arnica, the scout said:

"You are all right, Beelzebub, and the dizzy feeling will soon wear off."

"It don't hurt, sah; but it do feel as though a mule hed kicked me."

"Rest is what you want, and we'll go to the camp of these two gentlemen, for it cannot be far away."

The men had stood watching the every movement of the scout, and talking in whispers to each other.

"We hain't got no camp," said one.

"See here, men."

"You sought to kill this negro pard of mine, and that he escaped death is a marvel."

"I heard all that you said, and I know that you have a camp here, for you came from the camp of those who settled in this basin."

"That's so, Massa Bill, fer I knows 'em both, one being named Tom Vail and t'other they calls Rocks."

"Dey had two pards, and we all thought dey got kilt de day of de earthquake."

"I knows 'em, sah; but why dey want ter kill me I doesn't know, fer I never did 'em no harm, and den I thought dey was dead, and felt sorry for 'em; but dere must be two more of 'em, sah, so look out, Massa Bill."

"Yes, there are two more of them, though they are not here just now, but are due."

"I know a little about these fellows myself, Beelzebub, for they gave themselves away when they thought they had killed you."

"Come, lead the way to your camp, or I'll find a way to make you, and which you will not like."

The scout had unwound his lariat, so that they could walk side by side, and the two men saw that there was no nonsense to be put up with on their part; so one said:

"We has a leetle camp down the valley, if you wants to go there."

"Lead the way."

"Beelzebub, I'll help you," and, supporting the negro with his arm, Buffalo Bill followed on behind the two men as they shuffled along down the valley, the weapons of each man being hung about his neck so that they would have to carry them.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE GOLD BOOMERS' RETREAT.

The two prisoners walked slowly, partly because their legs were tied so as to prevent rapid traveling, and also because they did not wish to go.

They were livid with rage and fear, with hate and anxiety, for they did not know what would be their fate, while they saw their hopes dashed to earth in a second of time.

Down the valley they went for a mile, perhaps, the walk seeming to benefit the giant negro, and at last they turned into a small canyon in which grew a grove of pines, and at the head of which was a spring.

"De canyon whar de people hunt fer gold not far from here, Massa Bill," said the negro, and then he added:

"I jist guesses dat's what dese men is here for, while t'others is in de Lost Valley, for something has been de matter, sartin."

The camp now came into view, a stoutly built log cabin, with door and shutters of hewn timber, and a shed along the front.

It was near the spring, was sheltered by the overhanging cliffs and the pines, and, winter or summer, was a safe and comfortable retreat.

"De people built de cabin, Massa Bill; put it up for dere provisions, which dey kept here, ter keep from going back to de valley, sah, every night, and dey only all went on Sundays."

"And where are these people now, Beelzebub?"

"In de Lost Valley."

"Do they allow these two men to remain here alone?"

"Dey can't help it, sah," was the mystifying rejoinder of the negro, and Buffalo Bill muttered:

"Well, of all mysteries that I ever trailed, this one of the people of the Lost Valley is the deepest."

"So you did find your camp, eh?" said Buffalo Bill to the two men, and he made them fast to a tree, back to back.

Then he spread the negro's blanket for him upon the pine straw, and said:

"Now, Beelzebub, you lie down there, while I reconnoiter this camp, which is a very snug affair, I see."

The two prisoners muttered oaths, the black laid down at full length, and Buffalo Bill threw open the cabin door and shutters, which gave light within.

It was a large cabin, and there were a number of bunks in it along the rear wall.

There were shelves, too, with provisions, and a table, cooking utensils, weapons and picks, shovels, axes, and hatchets.

A haunch of venison hung under the shed outside, with bacon, hams, and dried fish, showing that the men were still well supplied with provisions.

In a plot of ground back of the cabin there were potatoes, cabbages, and turnips growing, and places to store them away for the winter.

"You fellows have had the best, I see, and I am going to know about you before I am done with you," said Buffalo Bill.

Then he added that he would cook dinner for all hands, and draw on the cabin's larder for his supplies.

A fire was smouldering outside of the cabin, and this was replenished, and soon a dinner of roast potatoes, bacon,

venison, hoeecake, and coffee was prepared.

Beelzebub was asleep; but woke at the scout's call, saying that he felt much better, save for a headache.

"It is well it is no worse, Beelzebub."

"Now, see what a good dinner we have; or, I may say, supper, for it is getting late."

"I guess we'll camp here to-night and return to our camp to-morrow; or I will go and bring the boys here, for you must keep quiet for a few days."

"What is you doing here in the Big Horn country, anyhow?" asked Rocks, as Buffalo Bill untied the hands of the prisoners for them to eat their dinner.

"That is just what I came here to ask you, and, as a Government officer, I have the call."

"The nigger calls you Buffalo Bill."

"Yes."

"Is you him?"

"Yes."

"I has heard of yer," said Rocks, watching the scout with interest.

"So has I," Tom Vail added.

"You may hear more of me before I leave this country of the Big Horn."

"Did ther nigger bring you here?"

"About that."

"What for?"

Buffalo Bill was willing to be questioned.

He might find out what Beelzebub had so far not made known to him.

So he answered:

"You know that this country belongs to the Indians, and the Government wishes to protect them in it, and will not send troops here, unless compelled to do so to punish murdering redskins."

"You men, and others like you, aware that the Big Horn is rich with gold finds, care nothing for the Government's pledges to the Indians, and invade the mountains and valleys as gold boomers."

"This keeps the Indians restless, revengeful, and hostile, causing them to kill bands of whites where found, raid settlements away from their lands, and thus force the military to punish them severely for what you gold boomers have driven them to do."

"You are, therefore, law-breakers, and become murderers, for you kill the Indians, and they in turn kill the gold boomers and many innocent whites as well."

"Now, I know that there is a settlement here, and, though they may have done no harm to the Indians, they are still law-breakers, and must leave the country."

"You'll have a lively time getting ther people of ther Lost Valley out of this country, Buffalo Bill."

"It may be; but they must go," was the determined rejoinder of the Chief of Scouts.

CHAPTER LIX.

PREPARING A WELCOME.

Buffalo Bill would have liked to have returned to his own camp that night, but he saw that Beelzebub was still somewhat dazed by the wound in his head, and he did not just know how it would turn out.

The scout had seen similar wounds prove fatal when least expected, and if the negro was left to guard the two prisoners he might lapse into unconsciousness, and there might be a possibility of the men getting free.

Then, too, he knew what had been said by the two men of the pards they were expecting.

They were over-due, and might never come; and yet, again, if they did happen to come that very night it would mean sure death to Beelzebub should he be left there alone.

So the scout decided to remain, and after the meal was over he secured the prisoners, left Beelzebub in charge, and started out to reconnoiter.

He was not long in finding a trail leading into a wild canyon, through which flowed a stream like a river in wet weather, but at other times was dry.

Going down this, the scout saw that he had struck the gold-beds of the people of the Lost Valley.

It was a case of placer-mining, the wash from the mountains of the particles of gold, and yet the pick and shovel had been brought into use also in the bed of the canyon.

"They have gotten considerable gold out of here, that is certain, and these men have been steadily at work, I see; but where are the people of the Lost Valley, for only these two murderous scamps seem to be anywhere about."

So musing, Buffalo Bill went on through the canyon, came out into a large valley, and, climbing to the top of a lofty cliff, looked about, glass in hand.

It was nearly sunset; and the rays of light were cast far down the valley, and the eyes of the scout fell upon moving objects there.

At once he turned his glass upon them.

"They are horsemen!" he cried.

"And they are coming this way."

A moment after he continued:

"There are two of them, but they are leading five horses.

"By Jove! I believe they are the pards of these two murderers, just returning.

"How lucky I did not return to my camp.

"Yes, they must be their two comrades; and, if these men are murderers, there can be no better that are coming.

"They are all of half a dozen miles away, and it will be an hour and a half before they can reach the cabin, and darkness will be in soon.

"I'll go and prepare for them."

The scout took another long look at the far-distant horsemen, then descended from the cliff, walked rapidly back through the gold canyon, and reached the cabin just as dusk fell.

"Men, I am sorry to have to gag you, and make you more secure, but I am determined to be upon the safe side.

"Are you well enough, Beelzebub, to help me?"

"Oh, yes, sah."

"Then get two sticks, put a piece of blanket over the head of each, and have it so you can tie it back of their heads."

"Lordy, Massa Bill, but don't yer think I knows how ter fix a gag in ther mouth, after what I hev hed done ter me in ther same way?"

"Yes; I remember you did suffer that way at the hands of Snaky Sam and his gold boomers.

"I will tie these men in their bunks, when they have been gagged, and they will give us no trouble or anxiety."

"It will kill us," shouted Rocks.

"Oh, no; you don't die so easily.

"Then, I will not let you remain so long."

The two men, bound as they were, sought to resist, but they soon found that they were as children in the hands of the scout, and they were placed in their bunks, made fast there, and the gags put in their mouths so that they could utter no sound.

To test this the scout gave each one a severe pinch, to make them cry out, but a low groan was all that they could utter.

"You see, Beelzebub, I discovered some visitors coming, and who I am sure are the pards of these two men coming for them; so we wish no outcries of alarm, for I shall capture them also."

The two men could hear, if they could not talk, and they writhed and moaned at what they heard.

"You, Beelzebub, hide in the pines, rifle in hand, and be ready to drop those men if they attempt to run away."

"Yes, sah; I'll do it."

"Hide a short distance off in the pines.

"Now, are you ready?"

"Yes, sah."

"All right. I'll wait in the cabin to welcome them."

The negro shouldered his rifle and walked to a place of hiding, with the scout by his side.

Then Buffalo Bill returned to the cabin and closed the door, to await the arrival of the visitors.

CHAPTER LX.

TAKEN IN MOST CLEVERLY.

That the Chief of Scouts had made no mistake in his surmise as to who the two horsemen were was proven by the sound of hoofs coming up the canyon.

Beelzebub saw by the moonlight two men, with five led horses, two carrying packs, pass by him.

He heard one say:

"I'll be sartin afore I make a break, for we don't know what has happened in ther three months we has been away."

"All right, I'll wait here," was the answer.

The first speaker then rode on alone to the cabin and called out:

"Ho, pards, kin yer give a couple of friends lodgin' fer ther night?"

The two prisoners writhed in agony of spirit, but Buffalo Bill, imitating the voice of Rocks, and having learned the names of the two men from Beelzebub, called out:

"Hooray! Is that you, Jim Sims and Alex Sands?"

"It are.

"Any one with you?"

"Yes; two pards is here.

"Wait until I open the door, and you bet we is glad ter see yer, fer Tom is laid up jist now and feelin' mighty bad."

"Hoop-la! Come on, Alex!" cried Jim Sims in a joyful tone.

"They is here, and all's O. K., with the goose hanging high."

The tone was exultant, and Jim Sims leaped from his horse, stepped to the door, and was suddenly seized by the throat with a grip of iron, hurled to the dirt floor, and heard the words:

"Utter a sound of warning to your pard and you are a dead man, Jim Sims!"

The man was silent with fright, and in an instant the lariat of Buffalo Bill had been passed around and around his arms, pinioning them to his body, while his weapons had been removed.

"Come in, Alex, and see poor Tom," said Buffalo Bill, and the other man, having dismounted, stepped into the cabin, to be felled his full length by a stunning blow dealt him by Buffalo Bill full in the face.

"Ho, Beelzebub!" called out the scout, and the negro sprung into the cabin at the call, having followed the last man closely.

The latter found himself bound before he recovered from the scout's stunning blow full in the face, but he gasped:

"Who is yer, cuss yer?"

"A Government officer on the track of gold boomers, four of whom we have just roped in, for there lie your pards Tom and Rocks, in as bad a way as you are.

"Is this one all secure, Beelzebub?"

"You bet he is, Massa Buf'ler Bill."

"Buffalo Bill! Great God! that means we hang, Jim Sims!" cried Alex Sands in bitter tones.

"So you are Buffalo Bill, is yer?" asked Jim Sims.

"Yes; anything else I can do for you?" and the scout naturally felt elated over his successful capture without firing a shot or having to take a life.

"No, cuss yer, yer hev done too much."

"We'll take the gags out those fellows' mouths now, Beelzebub, as we have these two secure," and, going over to the bunks, the two gags were removed, water was handed the men, and the four were at liberty to talk together, as soon as all four were secured in bunks for the night.

Then Buffalo Bill and the negro went out to care for the horses, and a good grass plot was found down the canyon, where the animals were staked out.

The two pack-saddles were well filled with supplies, and two of the other horses had bridles and saddles on them for the use of the men who were to ride them back to civilization when the gold boomers returned with their riches.

From the conversation of the four men, Buffalo Bill soon gleaned that the two men had had a hard time of it going through on foot, but had reached Helena

at last, and, after a long rest, had bought horses and supplies, and, watching their chance, had started back again for the Big Horn Basin for their pards, and, cheered by the riches they would become possessors of and were going to bring back with them to civilization.

The firelight showed Buffalo Bill that the two men had hard faces, about on a par with his first two prisoners, and he knew that it would not do to leave them alone, bound as they were, with Beelzebub, until the negro felt wholly himself again, and so he said:

"Now, we will turn in, Black Pard, and get a good night's rest, and to-morrow I'll go after the boys and bring them over here, for this seems to be about the end of our trail."

"It is, Massa Bill, and when I feels better in de morning I show you something, and tell you something, too, for I guesses now is about de time ter do more talkin' den I has done."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, but he was glad to feel that at last the silence of the negro was to be broken, the mystery of the Lost Valley and its people solved.

Throwing more wood upon the fire, and spreading his blanket, he turned in also, and only the crackling of the fire disturbed the silence of the night.

CHAPTER LXI.

A SECRET DISCOVERED.

When morning dawned, the scout and the giant black were on their feet.

The latter said that he was all right, only his head was sore and felt twice as heavy as usual.

The prisoners were taken out of the bunks in the cabin and tied to trees near the outside fire, where breakfast was put on by the negro, while the scout went to lead the horses to water and to change them to a fresh grazing ground.

This was accomplished by the time Beelzebub had breakfast done, and as the chief came up he found the prisoners talking earnestly with the black, who called out:

"Massa Bill, what you think dese bad gemmens want me to do just now?"

"Kill me, I suppose, and set them free."

"Lordy, Massa Bill, you read minds same as you does a book."

"It does not require much mind reading, Beelzebub, to know that they offered you big money to turn against me."

"That's just what they did do, sah; offer to give me half de gold dey have got to set 'em free and let dem kill you."

"They didn't know you, Black Pard."

"But I don't blame them, for killing is their trade, and they naturally wish to go free."

"Come, men, and we'll have breakfast," said the scout, with no show of resentment toward his prisoners.

The meal over with, Buffalo Bill decided to start at once for the scouts' camp, leaving Beelzebub to guard the four prisoners, who were greatly downcast at their failure to bribe the negro to allow them to go free, and which they could only do by putting the chief out of the way.

They had, indeed, offered him half the gold that they had, and said he could accompany them on their way.

That Beelzebub would prove false to him Buffalo Bill did not for a moment believe, and he called him aside and said:

"Last night I would not leave you alone with those fellows, Black Pard, for I was not just sure how that head of yours would pan out after that wound, and feared they might best you."

"But now you are all right, and I will go to our camp after the boys."

"You keep your eyes upon these men, for they are as tricky as snakes, and bound as they are, they are four, you one, and they may find some way of getting the best of you should you be off your guard for a moment."

"I hain't goin' to be, sah, for I is de man ter stay right here and watch dem."

"I believe that, and their offering you

gold amounts to nothing, for they would be traitors to you the moment you help them."

"I believe you, sah; I does, indeed."

"But you'll find 'em here when you gits back ag'in, and den we has a little talk, for I guesses de time hab come for it, sah."

Buffalo Bill said nothing to this.

He felt that circumstances had so shaped themselves that at last he was to discover what secret there was hanging over the Lost Valley.

So he shouldered his rifle and started off for the scouts' camp.

As he went by the break in the cliff where Beelzebub had so nearly lost his life the evening before he climbed up the rocks to the chasm out of which the two gold boomers had appeared.

He saw a canyon that was wonderfully wild and rugged, running through a range that towered high on either side.

The cliffs were lofty, the pass very narrow, and it sloped downward, and appeared to end abruptly, yet through the vista the scout looked far beyond to another vast range, and over a valley that lay several thousand feet below him.

Not wishing to take the rugged way then down the canyon, to have a look at the country beyond the opening, Buffalo Bill returned to the smaller valley he had been passing through, and continued on his way.

He had not gone very far before he saw two men approaching.

At a glance he recognized Arizona Charlie and Lasso Larry.

They saw him about the same time, and gave a shout of joy.

"We are after you, chief, for, as you did not put in an appearance last night we got anxious."

"Where's the black giant?" called out Arizona Charlie.

"Safe, but by a miracle only, for he got a wound that was a very close call."

"Fell on the rocks, I suppose, sir."

"No, he was shot."

Then Buffalo Bill told of the discovery so far made, and the capture of the four gold boomers, and learning that the scouts were scattered in search of him, he said:

"Lasso Larry, you return and bring the outfit here, for I will have some one down the valley to meet you."

"If the boys do not come in until night, come to-morrow, and Arizona Charlie will go with me now, and see if we cannot make further discoveries."

Lasso Larry at once set off on the return trail, and Buffalo Bill and Arizona Charlie went back down the valley.

As the break in the cliff was reached Buffalo Bill led the way up the steep hillside, and the two continued on through the narrow pass.

Buffalo Bill had an idea that he would make some discovery by going through that pass that severed the range.

As they drew near the further end they could see through the opening that a large valley lay far below them, a thousand or more feet.

The pass had narrowed to less than a hundred feet, and arose in solid walls of rock far above them.

When within a short distance of the end, Buffalo Bill halted suddenly and cried:

"See there, Charlie!"

"Why, it looks as though this end of the pass had been blasted out with powder."

"That is just what it was, Charlie, and—we have found it—see! The Lost Valley lies before us!" and Buffalo Bill's voice rang like a trumpet through the pass.

CHAPTER LXII. THE LOST VALLEY.

Arizona Charlie fairly started at the ringing words of Buffalo Bill.

The Chief of Scouts, since his meeting with the Black Giant, almost used up by starvation and wounds, had had his eyes upon the Lost Valley in the Big Horn Mountains.

He had given his pledge to the negro to answer the call upon him for aid, to go with him on what to other men would have seemed an aimless trail.

He had pushed on against all dangers, all obstacles, and his intent was to triumph.

With very little to work upon, a mystery to solve, he had at last found the El Dorado.

There before him was the Lost Valley.

The two scouts stood gazing through the pass down upon the valley, for it lay far below them.

It was no wonder that a triumphant smile hovered about the mouth of Buffalo Bill and his dark eyes glowed with joy.

He had come to the end of the long and perilous trail.

The situation was a striking one to both men.

Where they stood, beneath their feet, and all around them, the rocks were blackened with powder.

There had been a heavy blast there, as they could see.

And that blast of powder had shattered the cliff, and hurled a small mountain of rock down into the valley far below.

It had broken off the edge of the cliff right at the end of the pass most abruptly.

Right beneath their feet the cliff broke off and went downward almost like an artificial wall for a thousand feet or more.

The two scouts advanced to the edge and their eyes became riveted in wonder at what they beheld.

Below them was a valley, or rather a basin, for it was surrounded on every side by towering cliffs. No break could be seen anywhere, no canyon pushing into the surrounding walls of rock.

It was not a valley surrounded by mountain ranges, but a valley completely encircled by cliffs rising from one thousand to three thousand feet.

If they had a break in them, an inlet, an outlet, the glass of Buffalo Bill failed to reveal that fact.

It was a perfect marvel of nature.

A valley that seemed to have sunk downward and downward into the earth.

But that was not all, for right in its centre was a large lake, with wooded shores.

The valley was a couple of miles in diameter at least.

It was undulating, well timbered with trees large and small of various kinds, and it was a perfect garden spot of beauty.

And more, it was inhabited.

That was what the two scouts stood so intently observing.

Around the lake, in the timber, were scattered a score of cabins.

Behind each cabin was a well-tilled garden spot, fenced in, and off on the meadow lands at one end of the valley were visible a large herd of cattle, while there were horses and mules there too, considerable over a hundred in number.

A group of a score or more wagons were in one place, sheltered over by boards, and a smoke over in the timber was soon made out to be a small saw-mill at work.

There was one cabin larger than the others that appeared to be a storehouse; another was a church, for it had a steeple, and the ring of the blacksmith's hammer came from a shop on the edge of the lake.

Men were in the gardens at work; others were over in the heavy timber, and women and children were also visible.

The crowing of a rooster was heard down in the valley, and a flock of sheep was feeding right beneath the cliff on which the scouts were standing.

For a long time did Buffalo Bill gaze through his field-glass at the strange sight, and then without a word handed it to Arizona Charlie.

He, too, looked long and attentively, and when he removed the glasses from his eyes Buffalo Bill said:

"We have found the Lost Valley."

"Yes, indeed."

"What a beautiful picture it is."

"Beautiful, indeed."

"The negro told the truth, Charlie."

"He certainly did, but why did he not tell sooner?"

"That remains to be seen, and there is some mystery about his not doing so."

"How to get down there is the question."

"There must be some way, though it is certainly not from this side."

"That is evident, but Beelzebub will know."

"It is to be hoped so, but it looks to me like a perfect bowl into which you must tumble to get there."

"So it does."

After a close search of the cliff all around through the glass, Buffalo Bill said:

"I can discover no break anywhere in the walls."

"What do you think was the cause of blasting this cliff to pieces with powder, chief?"

"I cannot see through it, but Beelzebub must know, and we'll go and hunt him up, for there is no need of our remaining at the camp where I left him and the prisoners with that valley at hand."

"No, we will go there."

"And must start those people out pretty soon, for it will be slow traveling with a wagon train, and we must not be caught on the way."

"Come, we will go after Beelzebub."

CHAPTER LXIII.

A STRANGE STORY.

Arizona Charlie looked with interest as he approached the cabin in the canyon with Buffalo Bill.

Beelzebub, revolver in hand, lay on the pine straw, guarding his prisoners, who were tied to trees in front of him.

Neither the negro nor his prisoners heard the scouts approaching, but the latter heard Rocks saying:

"See here, nigger, don't you be fool enough to think all four of us is goin' ter hang, and that one of us won't git away, and that we will kill you sure as the sun shines if you don't let us go."

"That fool, Buffalo Bill, has gone off trustin' you, and our horses hain't far away, so we can all pack some provisions on, load up with gold, and be far away afore he comes back."

"As you say you are all on foot, ther scouts kin never catch us, and you'll git gold enough to last you all your days as a rich man."

"I'd rather be a poor honest man than a rich one what had betrayed the gemman I owes my life to more than one time."

"You gemmen is as bad as you kin be, and I'm enter your whole game now, though them in the Valley don't know it."

"When dey does, your necks won't be worth nothin', I is a-thinkin', gemmans."

"Good for you, Beelzebub!"

The negro sprang to his feet, and was face to face with Buffalo Bill and Arizona Charlie.

The four prisoners scowled and muttered curses.

"Well, Beelzebub, we have found your Lost Valley."

"Done found it, Massa Bill?"

"Yes, we went through the break in the cliff where you so nearly lost your life yesterday."

"Yes, sah, you kin see it from there."

"I have sent Lasso Larry to our camp after the boys, and we will all go down into the valley when they come."

A rude laugh came from the prisoners, and Beelzebub said:

"How you goin' to git down dere, Massa Bill?"

"By the trail."

"What trail, sah?"

"Is there no trail?"

"No, sah."

"How did those people get there, then?"

"Dere was a trail den, sah, but only

one, and it were through de pass and down de side of de cliff.

"It were mighty dangerous fer wagons, sah, but all right fer de people ter walk.

"Dey settle down in de valley, sah, and so many men work dere each day making homes, and de others came up here and hunt fer gold in de canyon we came through, and find a good little bit, too.

"Saturday night dey all went down in de valley to preach, pray, sing, and rest ober Sunday, for most of 'em mighty good folks.

"One Saturday, Massa Bill, all went but four men—here dey is, right here now.

"Dey had been working on de cliff road, blastin' it out wid powder, for we brought our wagon along, all full of powder, sah.

"Jist at sunset dere came what we all thought was a 'arthquake or volcano, and de whole front of de cliff fell into de valley.

"Dere was rocks and fire and smoke go way up inter de air, and three people in de valley was kilt dead—one man, one woman, and a little gal—and all was scared rich, sah.

"When dey got dere senses de next day, Sunday, dey came to de conclusion dat de four men, dese very gemmans here, hab let de powder git on fire and blew up de cliff and dem, too.

"But I now knows dat dese gemmans blowed up dat cliff on purpose, sah, dat dey might git all de gold what was found in de canyon and keep it.

"I now knows dat dey work hard ter git more; two of 'em went off after horses, and de other two stay here until they come back.

"Yer see, sah, as de men hunt gold in de canyon, and it so far from de valley, plenty of provisions was kept here in dis cabin, and dey hab all dey want.

"But, Massa Bill, dem poor people in de valley was same as in jail, for dey couldn't git out.

"I done feel so sorry for 'em dat I say I try ter climb up de cliffs and go for help.

"Well, sah, de cap'n of de folks tell me dat if I got out I must go for you, for you was a partic'lar friend of his'n."

"What is his name?"

"Massa Jack Bonehill, sah."

"Jack Bonehill!"

"Why, he is my old scout and a very dear pard.

"I owe my life to him many times, God bless his old soul.

"So Jack Bonehill is the captain of these gold boomers of the Lost Valley, Beelzebub?"

"Yes, sah, and he tell me ter find you, but not tell you no more than dat dere is people lost here and in great trouble, and wants you to come and sabe 'em, for you was de only man as could."

"That is saying a great deal, Black Pard."

"It am true, sah."

"I'll vouch for that, Beelzebub, for no other man could have brought us here."

"We came under Beelzebub's prescription of black faces, Charlie, until we reached our last camp, you know, when we washed off our false colors," said Buffalo Bill.

"The blackened faces saved us, no doubt, chief, more than once, but still that does not take from your bringing us here."

"Yes, you is ther man thet c'u'd do it, and cuss ye fer doin' it, Buffalo Bill," growled Rocks.

Buffalo Bill laughed and then said:

"Go on with your story, Beelzebub."

CHAPTER LXIV.

SUCCESS IN SIGHT.

"Well, Massa Bill, dere hain't much more ter tell, sah," resumed Beelzebub.

"You certainly got out of the valley."

"Yes, sah."

"How did you do it?"

"Well, sah, I am built like a cat, and kin climb any place I kin git a grip on.

"I went around hunting fer a place ter git up, and at last seen a shelf on a rock some two hundred feet up.

"We built a ladder, and I went up it drivin' big iron nails inter the crevices of de cliff ter hold it dere with ropes, and though it tuk weeks ter git ter that shelf, I got thar.

"From dere I c'u'd sling my lasso up to a tree in de cliff, forty feet away, and catch it.

"I tie my lasso end to de shelf in de cliff to come back by, and at last I climb up to de tree.

"Den I seen another tree I c'u'd lariat, sah, and I got dere, too.

"I were den jist about four hundred feet up de side of de cliff, and it hed tuk me weeks ter work up dere.

"I went on from dere, and seen I c'u'd climb up de balance of de way, so I concluded I were all right.

"Den I return to de valley, and it were ticklish work.

"But I got my weepens, my camp outfit, and provisions, and start once more, ebery man sayin' he wouldn't risk it, nohow.

"Dey all seen me go up, and dey pray for me.

"I heerd dem pray as I climb up and up.

"Many times I almost take a tumble, but I catch myself, and at last reach de top.

"I wave my hat and try ter holler fer joy, but I c'u'dn't do it, and I fell right down, I were so weak-kneed.

"Den I start on dat long tramp, Massa Bill, and find you, but I swear ter Massa Jack Bonehill I don't tell no one but you, for he say dey cum and rob 'em of de gold dey found, for nobody in de valley know dese four gemmans was so bad, and feel sorry for 'em, thinking dey was dead; but here dey was, plottin' ter git dat gold all de time.

"Hain't dey wery wicked gemmans, Massa Bill and Massa Arizona Charlie?"

"They are Satan's own sons, Beelzebub," cried Arizona Charlie savagely, while Buffalo Bill replied:

"You, Beelzebub, are a hero of heroes, and as brave and noble a man as ever lived, be he white, black, yellow, or redskin.

"These four men did prepare that powder mine to blow off the edge of that cliff and keep those people in the valley, which you people call lost, and they were a lost people as well.

"But we have found them, and we have not come all this way not to get them out of their trouble, for they must go back with us.

"You told me to bring plenty of lariats, Beelzebub, and I did so, in addition to which we have those of the Six Satans and Doc Miner's party, so that we must have several thousand feet of lariats, which we can make a ladder out of, with the aid of blankets.

"We'll get them, never fear, and we'll get these people out, take my word for it."

"I blieves you, Massa Bill."

"Now, Charlie, you remain here to guard Beelzebub's gemmen while I go with him to reconnoitre that valley."

The Chief of Scouts and the negro then walked away together, and the latter led the way to where the edge of the cliff had been blown off by the four traitor gold boomers.

Standing on the very edge of the precipice, Buffalo Bill began to watch the cliff sides with his glass.

"Try and make them see you, Beelzebub," said the scout.

The negro fired his rifle, and gave a loud halloo.

Many faces were upturned at once, women and children were seen running here and there, and a wild cheer arose as the negro was recognized.

The scene was a startling one, for the people in the valley were wild with joy.

Writing with a pencil upon several pages of his note-book, Buffalo Bill put them in his handkerchief, wrapped it around a large stone, and tossed it down into the valley.

There was a wild rush for it at once.

"I told them, Beelzebub, that we were here, planning to get them out of their valley.

"That I had noticed that the winding trail along the face of the cliff had been blocked up where the rocks had fallen below, and also that it could readily be reached by lariats from here, and we would find a way to overcome all obstacles and rescue them."

"You'll do it, Massa Bill, and I kin see now, sah, dat a few lariats tied together will reach de old trail yonder."

"And if they have powder and can blast the rocks out that fell and choked up the trail where it reached the valley, we can bring that whole outfit out of that valley, though it may take us a couple of weeks, perhaps longer, to do so.

"I will write them what to do."

Another note was written and thrown down as before.

Captain Jack Bonehill himself picked it up, and his voice reached those on the cliff:

"God bless you, Buffalo Bill.

"We have plenty of powder, and can blast this end clear.

"We can spare you some if you will lower lines, and there is another pass further along, which you can blast out down to the trail."

"Good!"

"We will begin work to-morrow, for all my men will be here then," was shouted back in the clear tones of Buffalo Bill, and a great cheer arising told him he had been heard, and hope filled every heart.

CHAPTER LXV.

OUT OF THE WILDERNESS.

The scouts all assembled at night in the cabin in the canyon, and were hilarious over the capture of the four traitors and the success of the expedition thus far.

The next morning all assembled upon the cliff, and Beelzebub led the way to the other pass, and it could be seen that a little blasting would cut it down to the ledge, a natural road, which had been destroyed at both the upper and lower ends by the treachery of the four prisoners.

The people in the valley were already at work, and lariats were tied together and lowered, to be drawn up again with kegs and cans of powder.

This was put in the most advantageous places, a train was laid, a signal given to those in the valley to stand from under, and then the mountain shook under the explosion.

The scouts gave a cheer as they saw the success of their first blast.

For days this was kept up, and then the pass was clear to the ledge, so that a man could pass through it.

Then the work in the valley was begun, and again and again the mountain trembled under the giant shocks given its base.

Days went by, and then Buffalo Bill, Beelzebub, and Arizona Charlie, with lariats swung over their shoulders, walked down the ledge toward the valley.

They came to within fifty feet of the bottom, and saw that a few more blasts would open the way, but they went down on their ladder of lassoos, made fast to the rocks.

Who can describe the joy of all, the greeting that Buffalo Bill, Arizona Charlie, and Beelzebub met with?

But Buffalo Bill and his scout comrade told all that the negro was the hero, that he had done all, for he it was who had wandered so long and faithfully alone in his tramp to save them.

And the story was told of the treachery of four of their number, and Buffalo Bill made the request, as they were in the way of all hands working upon the

cliff, that they be taken care of by guards in the valley.

They were then sent for, and their livid jaws showed their dread at meeting those they had so cruelly wronged.

Back to the cliff went Buffalo Bill and his two companions that night, and when they glanced down into the valley the following morning four objects were seen that were not there the day before.

But at a glance the scouts saw that they were gallows, upon each of which a human form was swinging.

The people of the valley had punished the traitors in their own way.

And while the four forms swung to and fro the gold boomers worked on untiringly, the rocks were blasted, the way made clear, and springing upon a horse that had belonged to the traitors, Beelzebub went down the trail along the face of the cliff to show that the way was clear, for Buffalo Bill said that the giant negro deserved the honor of going first.

That night the scouts slept in the valley, and the next morning all hands went to work repairing the wagons, harnesses, and shoeing the horses and mules, while preparations were made by the women for leaving the place, which, though a garden of beauty, had so long been to them a living tomb.

Just three weeks after the arrival of the scouts the march was begun.

One wagon at a time was taken up the ledge trail; the women and children followed, then the extra horses, and next the cattle, sheep, and all that could be carried along.

One wagon carried the gold, and it was found that there was enough of it to give to each one of the band a few thousand dollars when coined.

Buffalo Bill led the way, the scouts all mounted now, and with their faces blackened, to scare off any Indians that might obstruct their way.

Buffalo Bill knew that it was getting late in the season; the nights were very cold, there was snow in the air, and they would find that the Indians had gone into winter quarters, and unless they ran upon a village, they would meet none prowling about the country.

With a long glance at their homes, the march was begun by the people, and the Lost Valley was left deserted and alone, and if it has been found by any of those who have since that time invaded the Grand Basin, it must be to them, now in its ruins, a mystery of the Big Horn, the wonderland just now becoming known to the outside world, and which Buffalo Bill had penetrated many years ago.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CONCLUSION.

The march from the Lost Valley was a long one, and necessarily slow, with wagons, stock, and all pertaining to settlers on the move.

Trails had to be picked, roads cut here and there, chasms bridged, and ten miles was a good day's average.

Buffalo Bill led the way by the spot where Doc Miner's gold had been buried, and this was recovered, Beelzebub giving a band of Indians a fright here that sent them flying away for their village, wherever that was located.

"Dey run like de debble was arter dem, Massa Bill," said Beelzebub.

"From the name you bear, Beelzebub, I judge that he was; but that same name I do not like; it does not suit you, and I would rather call you Saint than Satan. At any rate, here goes for Bell for your name hereafter."

"Thankee, sah, very much."

"And Bell goes!"

"Three cheers for Bell, the Black Boomer of the Big Horn," cried Arizona Charlie.

The cheers were given with a will, greatly to the delight of "Bell," who

"And if it's de same to you, Massa Buf'ler Bill, I wants ter lib at de fort wid you, sah."

"It's a bargain, Bell," was the Chief of Scouts' ready answer.

Rock Fort was reached at last, and the scouts there were amazed at the cavalcade that they beheld.

A stop of a day and night only was made there, for the news had begun to fly, and Buffalo Bill led by the most direct course to Fort Fetterman.

The fort was reached some time after in a blinding snow-storm, and Colonel Mason and his soldiers were quite taken aback at the small army Buffalo Bill had brought back with him.

But the settlers were pardoned for their gold booming expedition into a forbidden land, after all that they had suffered, and were allowed to establish homes across the line in Nebraska, which they were glad to do, and where they still dwell, a well-to-do community.

Doc Miner went east soon after arriving at Fetterman, and is now married and dwelling in a fine home in Virginia, and which he has money enough to keep up in splendid style.

Arizona Charlie has been roaming in Mexico and about the Old World, too, and has won the name of the greatest of toreadors, though an American, and only a short while since he visited the writer at his home.*

Pony Bob, Robert Haslam, is a merchant in Chicago, and of the rest of that daring band of scouts who went in search of the Lost Valley only their chief, Buffalo Bill, still lives, while as a black shadow, Bell, once known as Beelzebub, still keeps near him and regards him, as he most justly is, a Hero of Heroes.

* Captain Charles Meadows of Arizona, better known as Arizona Charlie.

THE END.

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